

The parable of the Sower is one of the most familiar and yet of all the parables is one of the most misunderstood, probably because there is a supposed explanation of the parable. We take the explanation on face value, which of course we should, but we fail to comprehend it, within the context of the Gospel.

The parable is one of a number of parables that continue through the whole of Chapter 13 which are all about the Kingdom of God. If they are about the Kingdom of God, then, because it is in Matthew we immediately need to think about the Sermon on the Mount and the Kingdom Principles of the Beatitudes. It is an important principle when reading the Gospels, just because we are done with the Sermon on the Mount or the Beatitudes we don't forget them, they continue to be a lens by which we understand what happens in the rest of the Gospel.

In Chapter 13 we have the parable of the sower, the purpose of the parables, the interpretation of the parable. Then Jesus

explains the third field a bit more in the parable of the wheat and weeds, then the parable of the mustard seed and leaven to a certain extent expand on the fourth field of growth. Jesus then has another explanation on the use of parables, and then interprets the wheat and weeds parable, and then rounds out his teaching on the kingdom with the parables of Treasure and Pearl of great price, the dragnet, and new and old treasures.

We need to read these parables together, for they are put together by Matthew to tell us important information about the Kingdom of God and our responsibility in that Kingdom as Disciples of Jesus.

When we look at the parable of the Sower in the context of the rest of the parables in Chapter 13 what I think we can safely say is that Kingdom of God involves a proclamation that must be both received and lived out by each of us who claim to be disciples of Jesus.

It is an assertion about reality that is to be believed and allowed to have a defining reality in our lives, in other words we must allow the proclamation to shape us and transform us in some way, so that we become different people in our actions and our speech. While the Kingdom's coming does not now obliterate evil, it will one day, involve separation of the just and the unjust and while the Kingdom as it arrives seems very small and underwhelming it will have an overwhelming impact when the disciples live out their calling and take their place in the Kingdom.

Matthew intends the Kingdom parables to be a warning to us, not to repeat the failure of Israel to respond to the Kingdom message and to help us understand why Israel rejected the message, hardness of heart, the efforts of the evil one, the worlds cares and money and the seeming insignificance of the Kingdom. Here in these parables Matthew places an emphasis on the privilege of the disciple, that is you and me we have

heard what others longed to hear, and we should not squander the opportunity.

The parable is about the reality that the Kingdom is a Kingdom of the word, and the parable is about how we receive the word. To be a true believer in God and His Son Jesus, in other words a disciple, means hearing and remaining focussed on the message of the kingdom in such a way that we become defined by it. The key to spiritual formation is the willingness to listen, and responding appropriately to the received word of the Kingdom.

This parable before us is the overarching parable that controls the rest of the parables. This sets the scene. The four fields can be seen in different ways, it is the whole world that since the creation has responded to God in differing ways. Never hearing, having initial excitement, then falling away, receiving the word of God and then getting consumed by the world, and finally hearing and acting and producing Kingdom fruit. We see

this through the whole to the history of God's people from Genesis 11 through to the end of the Old Testament witness.

The parable can also be seen as Israel's response to God when they become God's people. We can also see the parable in the context of the time of Jesus and how they also respond to the message of Jesus proclaiming the kingdom. Finally, we can see the parable as our world and even our church. There are people in our church today who represent one of the four fields.

There are those who really do sit in our church and act as if they have never heard the message of Jesus. Their behaviours in our churches are disruptive, legalistic, seemingly never touched by the Kingdom message. There are those in our churches who have received the message with great joy, but when persecution strikes as it inevitably does they wither away and become distorted a grotesque caricature of what they are meant to be as disciples of the Kingdom of God. There are

people in the church who have received the message of the Kingdom but they have become more focussed on the world's messages than they have on the message of the Kingdom and so they become choked by the world and bear little if no fruit at all. And then there are the people who hear the message and somehow stay focussed on the message of the Kingdom and produce a harvest that is appropriate.

So the parable is about receptivity to the word and bearing fruit that is consistent with the reception of the word of the Kingdom. Two of the three sowings that fail describe people who responded positively to the message, they hear it with joy, but their hearing is still superficial. Receiving the kingdom with joy is not enough, and this we need to understand in our modern church. Faith that is temporary and unproductive is not true faith. While I would always be happy with people receiving the word with joy or making a claim about faith this parable asserts that people can receive the word with joy and still be guilty of

hardness of heart. Any hearing that does not result in productive living in relation to God is not true or valid hearing.

So what does that fruit look like?

Well, as I said earlier in the context of Matthew, we need to understand the gospel as a whole unit. Fruitfulness in Matthew is about discipleship, true discipleship. We understand discipleship in Matthew through the lens of the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes which are the norms of the Kingdom.

The first Beatitude is the controlling Beatitude. Blessed are those who are poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God. In this Beatitude it is the disciple who recognises their total dependence on God who is the one who will bear the fruit of the fourth field. While we can live in the world we can not be shaped by the world, that will simply allow weeds to spring up around us and choke us. When we have persecution which will inevitably occur, that is also one of the Beatitudes, depending

totally on God is the only way in which we will not wither and perish as in the second field. I also like to go to Paul, and Galatians 5 when he reminds us of what the fruit of the spirit actually is, love, joy, patience, gentleness kindness, long suffering. These fruits of the spirit is what I think Jesus is speaking about in this parable. And think about it, while he called 12 specifically he also simply went about speaking about the kingdom and embodying Kingdom principles and people flocked to him.

I think that we too need to call people specifically, but we also need to be a people who are willing to speak about the coming of the Kingdom of God and be people who exhibit the fruit of the Kingdom, love, joy, peace patience gentleness kindness long suffering etc. When we do this, then I believe that people will be attracted to the message and will want to join us, but they will only join us if we truly embody those Kingdom fruits. If we are distorted, disfigured, or simply choked by the cares of the world, then we will not be attractive to the rest of the world



for that is where they are already, why would they join us for more of the same? We need to embody the fruits of the Kingdom, and it is why our Diocese has the goal of making and nurturing disciples of Jesus, Loving as Jesus Loves and having the values of love, patience, kindness, empathy, long suffering, joy peace etc so that we might be a diocese that truly embraces the Kingdom message, hears it joyfully and acts on it faithfully despite all that is going on around us, and we will be fruitful and produce a suitable harvest that is right for the Kingdom of God.