

SERMON

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Spreading the Word Wide and Far

Nunawading and Waverley, 12-7-20

Dear friends in Christ,

Imagine if you decided to plant some seed at home. You step out the front door, reach into your bucket and hurl a handful of seed. Some fell on the driveway, some in the rock garden, some on the lawn and a few seed reached a patch of bare soil, rich and deep. It is madness but that was the funny parable Jesus taught those on the shore by Lake Galilee.

The point he was making was that he does not discriminate when he offers grace and the free gift of salvation. He wants all to live in fellowship with him and be included in his kingdom. It is stated so clearly in John's gospel: **for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son**. God loves the world. Thus, during his ministry, we see our Lord Jesus inviting babies to be blessed by him or a person like Matthew, who worked for the Roman occupying force. There were unclean lepers, rough fishermen, women, who supported him financially but also were trained by him. He spoke to zealots, like our terrorists, experts in the law and Pharisees and Sadducees, people who hated him. He was God's gift to the world.

To an extent, we move amongst people like that. Some are caught up in pursuit of money and material things, called **weeds** by Jesus. You will come across people who drink hard or are on drugs. People have multiple relationships, others abuse women (one in four women are abused!). Others tell lies, steal, withhold payments from workers. Plenty are angry about the way they have been treated. There is so much diversity, like the various soil types the Lord Jesus is describing here. These are the people you may know.

Interestingly, I don't know many people like this. Most of my friends are church people, fellow Christians who are like **the good soil** bearing fruit, praying, attending worship, giving, helping others and witnessing for Christ. You are making **100, 80 and 60 times as much** as the seed that was sowing. Our outlook, values and way of life are so different to many around us. And that can be our problem. We move in Christian circles and have few pre-Christian friends who need Jesus Christ.

I have been worried about this and have tried to make friends outside of Christian circles. To change the analogy, we can become like over-fed birds in a cage. We speak God's word to each other, continually sowing amongst ourselves. We need to take the seed to people outside the cage. Perhaps start with where you are: if you are in a swimming group, or you work and know people there, we have neighbours, friends at school or you rub shoulders with people at a play group or sporting club, it is amongst these folk that you can make friends. Most of us already have a full group of friends. However, this seed-sowing is not about us. We are motivated by Christ's compassion for others who are either struggling

through life without him, or sailing through life successful and happy but without a spiritual foundation. One-off meetings are easy because our investment is measured only in minutes but meeting again requires a commitment of ourselves. There are limits to our capacity for this but I do think that our circle of friends can expand.

In my witnessing, something I have had to learn is to stop preaching and to start asking questions and finding out about people. Imagine a neighbour you are befriending saying to you, "I notice you leave your house early Sunday morning. Are you going to church?" After replying, the temptation would be to express how good it is to know Jesus. There will be time for that later. Rather, ask, "What about you? Have you thought of attending church?" What you are doing is widening the conversation around the other person. Then you will be better able to say something more useful.

Be a resource, a person with more than one seed. There are multiple messages about Christ. Every now and again the bottom falls out of someone's life. Let's say a parent is worried over a child watching pornography. Offer to pray, listen some more, then, offer some advice. Don't stop there; look on the net. Download useful material and drop it around. We have many seeds to give, most of them of a practical kind.

Finally, sowing gives way to reaping. It could start with an invitation to events at church, a discovering Jesus course etc. Accompany them and be their sponsor. However, we will probably do more spreading of the word than harvesting for Christ.

No one knows where the deep soil will be and sometimes a concrete path impervious to the seed becomes rich humus receptive to the Holy Spirit. What we do is scatter the seed far and wide.