

## *Seeds, Soil & Sowing*

*(Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23, Preached by Cheryl Williams on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at Footscray Baptist Church)*

Lately, I have been doing a bit of gardening – planting daphne and camelias, fruit trees and rhubarb, herbs and vegetables. Digging holes, mulching etc. Some of it has been quite successful, some not so – the cauliflowers were stripped of their leaves by the frost or maybe a local possum.

In our reading from Matthew today, Jesus has a story about gardening. It is a parable but what is different about this parable, is, he goes on to explain it for his disciples.

The parable is a bit about sowing the message of God's love, and a bit about receiving that message.

So, to the parable:

- 1) A gardener scatters seed
- 2) The seed lands in 4 kinds of places, which represent 4 outcomes or ways of responding to the sowing. Some lands on the path and birds come and pick at it and eat it. Jesus says this represents those who hear but don't understand. Some seed lands on rocky ground, it grows quickly but because the soil has no depth it can't survive the drying out sun – this represents those who hear the message, are excited by the message but it doesn't really take root and is short-lived. Some seed falls amongst the weeds and as they grow, they choke the young seed as it begins to grow – this represents those who hear the message, but then the cares of the world begin to choke the seed and it too doesn't last. Finally, some seed lands in good soil and takes root and becomes viable and produces a harvest, sometimes small, sometimes large. This represents those who hear the message and stick with it and bear fruit or bring others into the kingdom.

So, in this parable, some find the message snatched away before they can really let it take root. Some find the message sown in rocky places and its effect is eroded away by all manner of things. Some find the message begins to live but is choked by other things. Some bear fruit.

I don't know about you, but sometimes I think I have been in all kinds of soil. Sometimes, I have allowed other things to take priority and the message of God's love has been snatched away. I have heard the message, but, my priorities have been on other things – work, study, money and God's love seems to be snatched away. Sometimes, I have found myself in rocky and difficult places and the seed of God's love takes root in my life for a while but is short-lived. Other times I have found myself amongst the weeds – my understanding of God's love is choked out by anger, bitterness or pain. Sometimes God's love has been received and I have really felt God's care and then given my life to do God's work in whatever context I have found myself – I hope that it has born some fruit in the lives of others.

A number of years ago I was leading a bible study on this passage with a Persian group and was concentrating on making sure we understood that the passage was about the importance of sowing seed in good soil and conditions.

My friend Kaz interrupted me and promptly showed me many, many photos on his phone taken in Iran. He showed me flowers growing in many rocky places, bright beautiful flowers growing strong. He then went on to explain how people in Iran plant or scatter seeds. There, they don't just plant in cultivated plots, there they scatter the seeds lavishly and see what happens, I guess that is what happens in Western Australia with their everlastings – the packet of seeds I have from there, just says to scatter the seeds.

At that point, I wondered if I had misread and misunderstood this parable.

I would like to go back to the parable and look at the sower, to see what the sower does. The sower scatters the seed generously, almost wastefully. There is an extravagance here, no favouritism here, the sower just seems to scatter the seed and then wait and see what happens.

I wonder where we find ourselves in the story. Are we the soils, are we the sower or might we be called to nurture the seed wherever it lands? The seed we know is the message of God's love.

I suspect we are all three. If we are the sower, planting seeds of God's love, then we need to follow the example of the sower. Sow generously, sow without fear or favour, sow lavishly, sow seeds of love everywhere even in places we might never think the seed will take hold.

If we are the soil, we might just need to have a look and see if we can find ways, for the seed to take hold. Protecting the path from things that snatch the seed away. Protecting the rocky places from that which erodes the soil, finding appropriate amounts of water and sun for the seed to flourish. Protecting the seed from weeds – getting rid of that which chokes.

If we are to nurture the places where the seed is sown we need to do some work.

Identify those things in the world that snatch the message of God's love and stop them in their tracks.

Identify those things that make it difficult for the seed to take root and do something about it.

Identify the causes of erosion and change the situation.

Identify the cares of the world that choke God's message of love and do something about them.

So, what stops God's message of love from being a reality in the world – doubts, criticisms, materialism, lack of time, priorities, success or lack thereof, injustice, racism – you can add to the list.

As disciples of Jesus we must take seriously all that gets in the way of people experiencing God's love, take seriously all that assails, troubles and frightens people from love breaking through.

We need to look for evidence of God's love in unlikely and unexpected places. We need to celebrate the situations in which God's love has taken root, especially when it has taken root in difficult places.

So today, go out from here and love wastefully.

Guard against that which erodes, chokes or takes away an awareness of God's love.

Be creative and find ways to deepen the soil in which God's seed of love has been scattered.

Be open and wait to see where God's love flourishes.

May our mission be one of generosity, have no favourites, be found in the sharing of God's love abundantly and lavishly. Amen.