

## **Address on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2020 – Lessons from Mark's gospel, week 4**

**Listening to God** The parable of the sower – Mark4:1-20

### **Introduction**

Although most of us are not involved in farming and even if we were we wouldn't be sowing seed by hand, this is one of those parables of Jesus which we can easily see in our mind's eye. It is not difficult to picture the sower with a big bag of seed tied around his waist walking across his field scattering handfuls of seed to the right and to the left.

If you were to come to the Rectory garden you would see that at the back Naomi and I have cleared some large areas previously covered in brambles and stinging nettles, which we have re-seeded with grass seed. We did exactly what the sower did in this story we scattered the seed across the areas cleared trying to cover every square inch without getting too much seed in one place.

### **The parable**

In the parable Jesus says that the sower's seed fell in various ways:

Some fell on the path where it was quickly picked up by the birds. I can certainly identify with this. Even though we protected our seed at the Rectory with netting and silver foil on strings to scare away the birds they took no notice and still tried to eat our seed.

Some fell on rocky ground where it sprang up quickly but because it couldn't put down its roots, it withered and came to nothing.

Some fell among weeds and as it grew the weeds choked the life from it.

Some fell onto good soil, grew strong and tall and yielded a harvest up to a hundredfold.

### **The explanation**

Jesus is speaking in this parable about the Word of God and different responses to the Word. Usually this parable is taken as a description of the way people hearing the gospel will respond to it.

For some it goes over their heads. Maybe they hear it, but it has no meaning for them. Like the seed that fell on the path it is gone before it can have any effect.

Others receive the gospel with enthusiasm but as they go on to find out more about God and the way he wants us to live our lives they turn away. There is an important lesson here for us, for we are reminded that there is a cost to following Christ. When we become Christians, we are expected to live and act in a certain way. As Jesus put it 'they shall know you by your love for one-another.' Our Christianity should shine through and make a difference to the way we speak and act and treat others. But some people don't want to change and so having received the gospel they sadly turn away.

Others hear the gospel and seem to want to follow Jesus but soon all the pressures in their lives, all the demands of daily living, their family responsibilities, their work, crowd out the call of God and they are unable to make the changes required.

But, says Jesus, when we faithfully preach the gospel, when we tell others about the love of God, when we share the message of Jesus and the forgiveness and new life available through

him, some will respond with open hearts and they will embrace the gospel, they will become disciples and go on to live as Christians for the rest of their lives.

That is how the parable of the sower is usually explained and I have no problem with that. It is surely the most obvious way to look at it.

### **A different explanation**

Years ago, however, I heard a slightly different explanation of the parable. The preacher said that maybe this is not about four different people's responses to hearing God's word, but four possible responses within one person. This is the gist of what he said:

Sometimes we hear God's Word and it has no effect on us whatsoever. Have you ever sat and listened to the reading in church and then realised at the end that you haven't taken in a single word? Maybe you were thinking about something else altogether or worrying about someone or something. We are easily distracted. Its one of the reasons that in our services in lockdown we have often had the bible reading first and a then a film clip covering the very same subject. There is more chance that if we hear a passage twice that it will actually sink in.

Sometimes we hear God's Word and it really seems to speak to us. In fact, it is amazing how often this happens. Naomi often sends me verses or excerpts from something she reads called 'The Cross in my Pocket.' God's Word really can be living and active, a message for us today and yet there are times when we just don't want to hear it. Sometimes the message is too tough, or it feels that God is expecting too much of us, so we turn our backs.

Other times we receive God's Word enthusiastically and say to ourselves 'I must remember this and take action' but then all the other things we have to think about in life crowd it out and the moment passes. Have you ever been fired up in church over something you've heard, or been convinced you need to take action in your life, but by the time you get home you can hardly remember what it was and by the next day all your good intentions have gone. We need to guard against letting the troubles of the daily round crowd out what God is saying to us.

And, lastly, there are times when we hear God's Word and it leads to lasting changes in our lives. We hear it, we receive it, we let it sink in, we respond to it, we make the changes it is asking for and we draw closer to God in the process and to the people he wants us to be. This is faithful Christian living, when we let God's word mould us.

### **Summary**

So as you hear God's Word read, or as you read it for yourself, have this parable in mind.

Don't let distractions snatch the Word away

Don't let the demands of the Word put you off

Don't let the cares of the world squeeze out God's message

but let the Word of God dwell in you richly that It may make a real difference to you and you to the world.

### **Prayer**

Father, hear our prayer, that we may be hearers of the Word and doers also. Amen.

**Anthony Smith**