

God brings in the harvest ...

... in His time

A sermon given on the Sixth Sunday after Trinity, 12th July 2026 – by the Curate, the Revd Charlie Shefford, in Beverley Minster.

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

In the ancient Middle East, farming had to be done with extreme care. The ground was ploughed ahead of time to catch rainwater and soften the soil. After this, seed was sown. And the ground ploughed again to cover it. And yet, even with this careful preparation, most seeds would not thrive. And appropriately, in our parable this morning, Jesus has much more to say about seeds that don't bear fruit than seeds that do.

First, he tells us of the seeds that fell on the path. In a small village in the ancient Middle East, nobody would have lived on their farmland, so getting to your farm required you to walk across paths on your neighbour's farmland. These paths through and around the fields were all a shared property - they belonged to everyone, and no one was allowed to plough it or close it off. So the seeds that fell on these paths wouldn't get ploughed and covered, so the birds would come and eat them.

Second, we are told of the seeds that fell on rocky ground. Farmland in most of the Middle East isn't like the sweeping endless plains of East Yorkshire. Much of it is terraces built into rocky hillsides and levelled off over centuries. And because of the rock just underneath the earth, there's no depth of soil, so things sprout quickly but struggle to grow and die just as fast.

Third, the seeds that fell among the thorns. These are roots of thorns. They have been cut down and are still in the ground and choke the seeds before they can grow.

And lastly, we are told of the other seeds that fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold.

So given that we ourselves are not agricultural workers in the Middle East 2,000 years ago, what is it Jesus is trying to tell us in this parable? Why did Matthew feel this parable was worth preserving for future generations like us?

First, it is an encouragement for those of us who are trying to share our faith and to live out our faith in the world. Jesus tells us not to start blaming ourselves if we are not making disciples in the way we might have hoped. He is telling us not to start the negative cycle of blame, thinking 'if I just explained better, witnessed better, if my life were a better example to others, if I just tried harder, everything would have gone well.' Jesus is letting you know that whilst it is certainly not a failure of God, just as importantly, it's not a failure of you. Even if you scatter liberally, many seeds, even the majority, will not ultimately bear fruit. Jesus's own ministry demonstrates that not all who we share the good news with will become disciples immediately.

Second, there is no instant discipleship. In Jesus's own day, the expectation of the Messiah, the arrival of the kingdom of God, was [that he would be] a politically mighty and powerful king, one who would swiftly crush Israel's neighbours and bring about earthly prosperity for God's chosen people. But Jesus tells us that the kingdom of God is more like a seed quietly and carefully planted in the earth. Many of us desire our spiritual life to be— 'There is eventually a harvest.... there is eventually a harvest.' This too is our hope. Even [through] apparent loss or disaster, the Holy Spirit is always at work, working to bear fruit in your life and the lives of those around you, even if it's not quite how we expected.

And finally, the sower sows liberally even in places from which they don't expect very much. And so it must be with us. We're not being told to ignore the ground bearing much fruit, but we have to be prepared that God may call us to share our faith and bear witness in unexpected ways and unexpected places.

This morning's parable reminds us that our role is to sow - faithfully, generously and without fear of failure. It is not our task to control the outcome, to control which seeds bear fruit, but to continue in our faithful witness to the gospel: in prayer; in loving those near to us and those on the margins; in being unashamed and unembarrassed in sharing our faith with others.

Let us trust in the quiet, steady work of God's kingdom that is growing among us. Let us not be discouraged by what we perceive as failure, but remain faithful in our witness, knowing that God brings the harvest - in his time.

Reading Text

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

¹ That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. ² Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ Let anyone with ears listen!'

¹⁸ 'Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³ But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.'