

Worship for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity

Greeting

Your word is a lantern to our feet
and a light upon our path.

Prayer of thanksgiving

Blessed are you, Lord our God.
How sweet are your words to the taste,
sweeter than honey to the mouth.
How precious are your commands for our life,
more than the finest gold in our hands.
How marvellous is your will for the world,
unending is your love for the nations.
Our voices shall sing of your promises
and our lips declare your praise
for ever and ever.

Amen.

Confession

**Lord God,
we have sinned against you;
we have done evil in your sight.
We are sorry and repent.
have mercy on us according to your love.
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.
Renew a right spirit within us
and restore us to the joy of your salvation,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Absolution

May the Father of all mercies
cleanse us from our sins,
and restore us in his image
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Collect

Almighty God,
send down upon your Church
the riches of your Spirit,
and kindle in all who minister the gospel
your countless gifts of grace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Old Testament Reading Isaiah 55.10-13

Gospel Reading Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23

Reflection

Trinity 5 reflection

Isaiah 55.10-13 Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23

I have lost count of the number of times I must have heard or read the parable of the sower. At the very least, it must be half a dozen times a year for the last thirty, and a fair few times before that, right back to sitting as a child cross-legged and restless in a primary school assembly while the headteacher told us a story about a farmer who went out to scatter the seed and... well, we know the rest. But, however familiar I was with this parable, it took a comment a couple of years ago from someone who is a farmer to draw my attention to a key aspect of the story. Farmers know the value of grain. Whether the seed has been reserved from last year's crop or bought anew it is a valuable commodity. It is not to be wasted. And so, no farmer in their right mind is going to just strew it everywhere, recklessly and carelessly, so that a whole lot ends up on the path, or on the stones, or among the thorns.

And yet, that is precisely what the farmer in Jesus' parable does. Only a small proportion of the precious seed lands where it should, in the good soil where it will take root and grow and yield a rich harvest. Of course, this is not the only time that Jesus tells a parable in which the lead character acts in a way that we would judge irrational or wrong. It's often the way a parable works, prompting the listener to ask questions about what the story means.

So what are we to make of the parable of the sower (or, as perhaps we should call it, the parable of the wasteful farmer)? Fairly obviously, Jesus is not giving us lessons on agriculture, anymore than he was giving the disciples a lesson about fishing when he commanded them to lower the nets on the other side of the boat. But neither, I think, is he giving us a moral lesson, about the importance of being "good soil", and avoiding the temptations and distractions of sin, the world, and the devil. The parable is telling us about God, and the growth of God's kingdom, and the surprising, unexpected ways in which God works and in which that kingdom comes.

God is a generous, reckless, even wasteful God. The good news of God's kingdom is not shared only with those who are deserving or receptive. The seed is scattered, here, there and everywhere. And those who are sent with the message of the kingdom are charged to go to all people, and declare the good news of God's love. It is a message that some will dismiss out of hand; some will respond positively, for a while, and then give up; and for some it will be the life-changing, life-enriching, moment that transforms everything.

Part of what the parable does is to reassure the disciples that this range of responses to the gospel is to be expected. It's not their fault that some people are resistant to the message. The seed of the gospel does not always germinate, and take root, and grow, and become fruitful. But sometimes – sometimes it does, and when it does it makes all the rest worthwhile.

Of course, it would be so much easier if we knew in advance where the good soil was. But we don't. You might say that's where the parable breaks down. A farmer will know what is the fertile land, and will have worked hard to prepare it. But perhaps that's also why the farmer in our story is so apparently wasteful in scattering the seed so randomly. What if there's just no way of seeing what is the rocky ground, what is the thorny ground, and what is the good soil? If you can't tell in advance where the positive response to the gospel will come from, then there is only one thing to do. Scatter

the good seed wherever we can. Throw it to the winds, which will take it where they will. Don't worry about that which seems wasted. Trust In God that some will land where it is needed, and the kingdom will take root and grow and bear fruit in abundance.

Intercessions

Prayer of Commitment

**Almighty God,
we thank you for the gift of your holy word.
may it be a lantern to our feet,
a light upon our paths,
and a strength to our lives.
Take us and use us
to love and serve all people
in the power of the Holy Spirit
and in the name of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Blessing

The Lord bless you and watch over you,
the Lord make his face shine upon you
and be gracious to you,
the Lord look kindly on you and give you peace;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**