

ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK & BRAY - 10TH JANUARY 2021

THE PARABLES OF JESUS: THE SOWER (LUKE 8:4-15)

Welcome and Announcements

"Welcome to our 'Church at Home' service transcript for Sunday 10th January 2021. Today we're beginning a brand new series looking at the parables of Jesus, and we're going to start with the 'Parable of the Sower.' I pray that you will be encouraged and blessed as you read this today"

- Rev. Andrew Gill

Call to Worship – Psalm 29:1-2

Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings,

ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;

worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness.

Prayer for the New Year

Everlasting Father we bless you

for sending your Son, your only Son, whom you love,
into the world, so that we might live through him.

Lord Jesus Christ we bless you
for bringing life and immortality to light
through your Gospel of peace.

Holy Spirit we bless you
for giving us new life in Christ,
and for filling our hearts with his love.

Guide us, O Lord,
in all the changes of life,
that we may neither complain in adversity
nor boast in prosperity;
but with faith, hope, and love,
may follow your divine will;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reading - Luke 8:4-15

While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown."
When he said this, he called out, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that,

*"though seeing, they may not see;
though hearing, they may not understand.'*

"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when

they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

Sermon - 'Parables of Jesus; the Sower'

The 'Parable of the Sower' is one of my favourite parables, but it's also one of my favourite parts of the whole Bible. In fact, it's something that God used in my call to ordained ministry.

I grew up going to church, and came to faith at an early age. Once I was old enough, I started to help out in my church youth group, I volunteered at camps, and spent most of my 20s involved in youth ministry, even being a full-time youth worker for a while. During that time, I saw how hundreds of young people responded to hearing about the good news of Jesus, and it always concerned me about how people responded in such different ways. There are some people that would hear the gospel, but it never produced any faith in their life at all. It just went in one ear and out the other. There were some that heard the gospel and they came to faith, and were so excited and passionate about it, but only for a little while. They soon gave up, and now, sadly, they've no faith at all. Some people heard the gospel, and though they came to faith, that faith didn't seem to make too much difference in their lives. While then, there were some that heard the gospel and came to faith, and you could see that their faith was really important in their lives. I saw God do amazing things in their lives, and through their lives, and years later they're serving God, helping others, and still growing in their faith.

Why? Why do people respond in different ways? Well, this parable that we are looking at this morning helps us to understand exactly what is going on. If we're going to be looking at parables over the next few weeks it is important that we understand what a parable is. A parable is, on the surface, a simple story that Jesus told about normal everyday life, but which contained a spiritual meaning. Now for some people, this other meaning is completely hidden, but for those that are able to understand it there are deep spiritual truths that can be gained from them about the Kingdom of God, about who Jesus is, and about what it means to follow him.

The parable of the sower begins with a farmer out sowing seed, and Jesus says that some of the seed falls on the path where people stand on it, and birds come and take it away. Other seed falls on rocky ground and it starts to grow. But there are no roots, so once the sun comes out there is no moisture, and it withers and dies. Other seed falls among thorns, and while it does grow, thorns grow around it, and so it never produces any fruit. But some of the seed falls on good soil, and it grows and it produces a crop, even a hundred times what was planted. As Jesus finished, he called out, 'everyone who has ears to hear let them hear'.

That's a nice story about a farmer going out to plant seed, but what does it mean? What is the spiritual truth that we are to gain from this? The disciples were obviously a little bit confused about the true meaning of this parable, so they came to Jesus afterwards and asked him to explain. Jesus says that just like the four types of soil there are four types of people. Some people are like the seed that fell on the path. They have a hard heart, and refuse to accept the word of God. Some people, like the seed that fell on the rocks and have a shallow heart. They accept the word of God initially, but as soon as life gets difficult, they give up and turn away. The seed among the thorns stands for those people who have a distracted heart. They accept the word

of God, but they also hold on to all their worries, their desire for riches and for pleasures, so the word of God never has any room to fully mature. But the fourth type of people are like the fourth type of soil, they've got a heart that is open. They receive the word of God, allow it to put its roots down, and they produce fruit in their lives.

When I started to understand this parable, it made much sense of what I'd seen in so many people. I could see how people I knew demonstrated those four types of heart responses to hearing the gospel. There were people that had a hard heart, people that had a shallow heart, people that had a distracted heart, and people that had a good heart. This parable gave me understanding but it also gave me a vision. It made me think, 'what would life be like if people were like the fourth type of soil, what if our churches were full of people, that when they heard the word of God, they accepted it, and through patience and perseverance allowed it to produce a fruit in their lives?' That vision led me on to where I am today, and it is my desire for the congregations of St. Andrews in Bray and in Blackrock. My prayer for this coming year is that we allow the word of God deep into our hearts and allow the gospel to put down its roots. That we survive the time of testing, and get rid of our worries and the desire for other things, so that we can produce the fruit of love.

This parable has given me understanding, it has given me vision, but it also challenges me in my own life. Even this week as I was reading it again and studying it, I was challenged because it's not just about how we heard the gospel once, but how we hear the gospel every time. You see, it's easy to open up a Bible, read a verse and then immediately forget all about it. It's easy to go to church and get excited, but never actually change anything in our life. You know, it's easy to want the things of God, but to also hold on to our worries, and to want our wealth, and the pleasures of this world as well.

But God gives us his word to produce a change in our life, he wants it to bear fruit, he wants us to have a good heart, to listen, and to put into practice the things that we hear. So over these next few weeks as we look at these parables, what is our response going to be? Are we going to have a hard heart? Are we going to have a shallow heart? Are we going to have a distracted heart? Or are we going to have a good heart, because these parables paint pictures of God's Kingdom, they show us the truth of who Jesus is, and what it means to follow him. The truth contained in these parables is amazing, and it can produce the most wonderful change in your life when it is heard and truly accepted.

So, over the next few weeks as we look at these parables of Jesus, let us pray that God will give us a good heart, and that he will give us ears to hear, and a life open to respond.

Prayer

Father God,

Give me ears to hear what your spirit says to me now.

Forgive my hard heart. I pray that neither demon nor destruction would snatch your word away from me today.

Remove the rocks of pride in my life, and allow the roots of the gospel to grow deep into my heart. Give me courage and faith to endure times of testing, and by your grace keep me from falling away.

Help me to get rid of the weeds of worries, the thorns of greed, and my desire for the pleasures of this world, so that your word would bear the fruit of love in my life. Amen.