

Pentecost 6 Year A 12 July 2020

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Contemplatio: Michael Wood

One of the questions which shows up with some regularity in the gospels is why some people seem to 'get' Jesus and what he's on about and some do not. And the interesting thing is that whether or not someone comprehends the word of the Kingdom and bears fruit is not necessarily correlated with whether a person is a so called 'religious' person.

There are many self proclaimed people of faith who do not seem to live lives which bear the fruit of the kingdom – what Paul calls the fruits of the Spirit...

-peace, patience, kindness, joy, generosity, faithfulness, self control

On one hand people are saying 'yes yes' with their mouths – but acting no-no with their lives.

And it can work the other way. Some people are saying, 'no no' with their mouths (that is, swearing black and blue that they have no particular faith, and yet lives of quiet generosity, peace and joy).

This parable of the sower in Chapter 13 is really a commentary on the previous two chapters where we find an increasing hostility by the Pharisees to Jesus' ministry. The Pharisees were not bad people – they were a very respectable group of Jews who had an extremely high regard for scripture. St Paul was a Pharisee. But some of them, including St Paul before meeting Jesus on the Damascus Rd, believed that Jesus showed a gross lack of respect for the scriptures ...so much so, that by 12:14 we find the sentence, "*the Pharisees went out and conspired against Jesus, how to destroy him*".

The parable of the Sower which Jesus offers is in response to the question – why so much hatred? Why so much resistance to Jesus by religious people? Why so much violence?

If God is sowing God's word with such wild abandonment and expecting to grow a fruitful crop, then why aren't more people responding? If God's word is a word of peace then why isn't there more peace? What's getting in the way?

In today's Gospel we have the advantage of Jesus providing some interpretation of his own parable. First of all he says that the seed being sown is the "word of the kingdom".

Jesus said many words about the kingdom, but it was the brilliance of St John who recognised that the primary WORD was Jesus himself....not a written text but a person.

When the seed of God – the life of Jesus is planted in the hearts of his listeners – and when the life of Jesus through the Spirit is planted in our hearts, it either grows, or gets stripped away, or gets snuffed out according to the environment....is the environment welcoming or hostile?

I have a little experiment going on in my garden right now which illustrates this. I planted some wildflower seeds. Some I put in a lovely rich weed free native potting mix. Some I just threw in to unprepared soil. The seeds I put in the putting mix went off like a rocket. The ones I just threw in unprepared soil – nothing.

There was no problem with the seed but the receptivity is everything. According to Matthews account, there are three things which prevent the seed from growing and bearing fruit:

- (i) The first is an incapacity to *comprehend* the seed – to even begin to make sense of what it is. Again, coming back to St John, he says, ‘the LOGOS was in the cosmos and through him the cosmos came to be, and the cosmos did not **recognise** him’(John 1:10). The reason for this is that Christ is a different kind of logic to the violent logic of the world, so its almost like we don’t have the perceptual apparatus to perceive what is before us. Dogs, for example, can smell things at a thousand times the sensitivity of humans. There are things which we simply cannot smell that that can. So when it says, ‘the wicked one comes and seizes away what has been sewn in his heart’, he’s referring to the logic of violence which cannot comprehend the logic of grace.
- (ii) The second problem is persecution and tribulation. Frankly, it is incredibly difficult to stand up against the majority power of the mob.
- (iii) The third problem is anxiety of this life and the beguilement of riches.

I wonder if this says something about the potential value of the contemplative life? Could it be that meditation is really just a **cultivation of conditions** in which the seed of God’s Word, which is Jesus himself, might find a welcoming place to grow, yielding the fruits of the Spirit which Paul talks about?

Most of the things that choke the Word in our lives are very ordinary everyday things like the comparison game, competition, needs for success, to be liked, or to be in control – all the things which choked the life out of Jesus on the cross. Meditation is the practice of the gentle release of such compulsions and the cultivation of conditions of deep listening – so that we might perceive the presence of Christ and be responsive to him. Contemplation is actually an expansion of our perceptual apparatus - the spiritual equivalent of having a dog’s expanded sense of smell.

While always remembering that even contemplation is a gift of the Spirit rather than our own work. It is not so much that we become more accomplished but, rather, that we have been ‘sniffed out’ by God’s Spirit and have had the seed of the Word of Christ placed in our hearts.