

“Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear."

"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

Back in May some of you gave a gift to Australian Lutheran World service for the people of Sudan. They were literally facing starvation. Some of them had seeds to plant but had to make a choice between eating their grain now and having no crop in the future, or planting the precious seed but dying before it produced a harvest. Some choice. Some of you sent the gift of seed to them. That seed has been planted in the ground and now they and we all pray for a harvest.

Today's words of Jesus are about seeds and sowing them and a harvest or lack of it. A man throws seed all over the place. Sounds a bit wasteful really. Precious seed, but he scatters it everywhere. He doesn't seem to care that some falls on pathways and rocky ground, and ground that had weeds in it, and that only some fell on the good stuff.

That's a lot like God, Jesus is saying. God scatters and sows the seeds of the kingdom, his life giving word about Jesus, his love for us, forgiveness, salvation and eternity all over the place, all over the world. He does it through me in my robes and in this church and through you in your daily work clothes and at your work place, he wants to sow it in our own backyards and across the fence into our neighbour's. He wants his kingdom to be sown and to grow all over the place, and he provides more than enough seed to scatter, because his love to us in Jesus Christ is enough for the whole world.

God invites us to scatter it with him and for him. Sometimes that can be a frustrating business, just like farming itself. In Jesus' story some seed doesn't come up at all because it falls on ground that is too hard and the seed is easily picked off by the birds, some comes up in shallow soil but doesn't last long and withers when the weather hots up, and some comes up but gets choked by weeds. But some seed does grow, and it produces a harvest of more seeds, some plants more than others, but that's ok, the farmer seems happy that at least some seed does anything at all. Sometimes the harvest is awesome and inspiring, sometimes ordinary, but at least it produced something.

That's how God sees the sowing and harvest of his kingdom here on earth. The kingdom is sown in the lives of all sorts of people, his word reaches the ears of people in all sorts of ways and places. Sometimes those ears are deaf ears and those hearts are stony and cold. Nothing germinates in them. They resist and reject and ridicule the good news of God's love for them in Jesus. Sometimes the good news of God does produce faith. People hear it and believe it, but then

they fall away when other things compete with God's word and choke the life out of their faith. Or when bad things happen their faith withers and dies. It was only a fair weather faith.

That's disappointing to God as it is to us. The disappointment of repeated harvests can bring even hardened farmers to the point of giving up, just as it often disheartens the church to see people not responding or responding only for a little while to the word of the kingdom. It happens to children after confirmation, it happens to adults who come to faith. And the danger is it can happen to us too.

But as God sees it, (and sometimes it is only God who sees it), there will always be a harvest, a harvest that comes from hearing his word, the good news of Jesus and life with God through him. Somewhere someone will hear it, respond to it, and stay with it, producing the fruit of that faith in their lives. Sometimes that fruit will be spectacular, an incredible life change and story to tell, other times it will be more subtle but no less a miracle.

I remember one of the Gideons who place Bibles in motels and hospitals and prisons and in schools telling me how a Bible was given to a high school class in Penola in the South East. After school the teacher who was not a Christian found many of them in the bin. He took some home and read one and came to faith in Jesus Christ. He took two of those Gideons Bibles with him to his family in England and his mother and a brother became Christians. Some seed fell on the path and was picked off before it could germinate but some fell on good soil and bore a harvest of three.

God doesn't seem to give up, and neither should we who are called to scatter the seed of the kingdom with him and for him. We "share-farm" with him – we share his sadness when nothing grows and we share his joy when his seed produces anything at all. Jesus says that's how it is, and always will be. So don't beat yourselves or each other up if nothing or little happens and don't give up altogether.

And Jesus would say to us his church today "make sure you hear the word of God yourselves, and receive it in faith and act upon it". "Don't let the word of the kingdom be wasted on you". "Don't let the cares and worries of this life snuff out the faith you have". "Don't let the problems and bad things that come your way shrivel up your faith". "Don't hear the word of God in one ear and then let it pass out the other ear, but let it sink deeply into your mind and your heart and let it produce a harvest in you".

Life only grows and flourishes in the right environment. Seed grows best in warm moist soil or eventually it dies. Children too grow in the right environment. The tragedy of the week here in Adelaide was the baby only hours old who was found in the driveway by a neighbour. Children don't grow on driveways out in the cold– they grow when they are nurtured and loved and fed and hear the loving voices of their parents. Children of God don't grow when their hearts are cold and hardened to the word of God. Children of God grow when they hear the voice of God in his word and receive his tender loving care, otherwise they die tragically too, cut off from his life. God has given you the new life of his kingdom and he doesn't want it to die, he wants it to live and grow and be fruitful for him.

So when you hear the word of God in church and in your homes picture it as God sowing his life into you, his kingdom into you, and believe he wants something to come of that word whenever you hear it or read it. Don't let it be wasted on you. Sometimes you will resist it and be hardened to it, sometimes it will get choked by other things that are on your mind, sometimes you will not understand it, sometimes you will believe it but five minutes later you have forgotten it and gone back to being your old self. But don't stop hearing it yourself and somehow, someday God will make sure there is a harvest in you again.

His business is growth, ours is to make sure we hear the word ourselves and let it bear fruit in us, and our business is to scatter the seed of God's kingdom all over the place, trusting that some of it, somewhere will lead to someone enjoying the life in God's kingdom that we do.