

---

# Sowing the Seed

**Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 16 July 2023**

Genesis 25:19-34 • Romans 8:1-11 • Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

---



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the sower. It is a very detailed parable, and one of the few which he goes on to explain. It is curious that Jesus came to us as a human being in order to teach us the ways of God, and yet he sometimes seems to speak in riddles. On some occasions, he openly states that the people will not understand what he says, that their ears are closed and their perception is faulty. Some things are just for the disciples to understand — and of course, they have their moments of confusion too!

The parable of the sower is all about understanding and acceptance. Jesus talks about four groups of people: those who do not receive the word, those who quickly forget the word, those who do not internalise the word, and those who receive it, keep it, and live by it. Obviously, we want to be in this last group.

If you're like me, you worry sometimes that you are living up to Jesus' words: "someone who hears the word and understands it ... someone who produces a crop yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown" (Matt 13:23). A certain amount of guilt creeps in as I consider what crop I am yielding. Am I doing enough? Does God expect more of me? And when we come to the final judgment, will I be commended, or found wanting?

In thinking about this, I find the question breaking down into two parts: do I know what God wants me to do, and do I have the gifts to do those things?

Let's look at the second question first. We know about gifts: God gives each of us talents, things we do well, whether it be music or writing or sports or something else. Some gifts seem small to us, small and specialised. You might be really good at sudoku. You might be really good at shooting a ball through a hoop. Or you might be a good listener. But none of these gifts is small, if you practice it with all your heart, and if you find a place where your gift may be used to help someone else.

Sometimes it takes time to discover your gifts. I don't know if it's a gift, but I've only just discovered, after six decades of life, that I like to grow vegetables. Now, that's not an unusual gift. New Zealand is a nation of gardeners, which is a great thing. But it surprised me when I found it for myself. Could this gift be used in God's service? Sure — I could help out at a community garden, feeding people who maybe don't get enough fresh things. Though I tend to spend my time using other gifts, such as preaching. Is one gift more valuable than the other? In God's eyes? Maybe not. God gave me these gifts for a reason, and maybe it's up to me to find a way to use them. Maybe this is my crop — not just a crop of vegetables, but of words spoken and hopefully heard by those who need to hear.

And you could think of other examples:

The gift for sudoku might just help a struggling student with their math homework.

The gift for listening would surely help people who have suffered trauma of any kind, or just the guy next door whose life hasn't been going so well lately.

The gift for shooting a ball through a hoop — well, isn't sports a great way to build social skills and teamwork among kids?

And this brings us back to the first part: do I know what God wants me to do? I think when you get right down to it, God wants us to use the gifts he gave us. Why else would he give them? Seems obvious, and yet it is so easy for us to get bogged down with worrying what we should do to serve God and other people. Simply do what you can do. And do it the best you possibly can, because you were chosen by God to do this thing. Surely God smiles when we take our gifts and use them well.

Is this spreading the Gospel? Well, do all our actions have to be those that spread the Gospel? I think the answer to that is "no" ... and "yes." Jesus told us to serve

the poor, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked. Those are things we can do which do not specifically spread the Gospel of salvation. That is, they do not necessarily bring a person to faith in Christ, but they are good things to do, and Jesus asks us to do them. Certainly, many of us will have received gifts which can be applied directly to helping the poor and needy. But in a sense, everything we do, by demonstrating the life of a believer in Christ, may make an impact on those we meet. The saying, “Preach the Gospel at all times; and if necessary, use words,” is attributed to Francis of Assisi, although there is some doubt that he ever said it. A more reliable quote of Francis’, according to my reading, is: “It is no use walking anywhere to preach, unless our walking is our preaching.” This is a similar idea, and stresses the point that how we live our lives shows our faith.

How can the way we walk (or dress, or act, or deal with others) ever bring someone else to Christ? Here, I think, is where we come up against the limits of human ability. None of us can actually bring someone to Christ. We can suggest, by words or otherwise (and I don’t mean to disparage direct Gospel-talk, if you have that gift); but only God truly makes disciples. When we say that it is our duty to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19), it means to lead them toward God, in whatever way we can, so that God may change their hearts within them. And remember, God is always working within us, too, changing us, helping us to grow in faith, making us better able to use our gifts and hence, better able to do our bit towards making disciples.

So we need not feel guilty. God is in control, and will empower us as necessary to do his work in the world. It is a wonderful thing that we have a God who lets us, and indeed wants us, to work with him to bring forward the kingdom. Let us be sowers of the good seed of God’s grace and salvation. Amen.