

St Peter's Anglican Church, Bundoora
Proper 10 – 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sunday 16/07/2023

Readings: Genesis 25 19-34 / P's 119 105-112 / Romans 8 1-11 /
Matthew 13.1-9 (10-17) 18-23

Sermon Theme: *Recognising Fertile Ground*

By Rev'd Stephen Monsieigneur

Genesis 25.19-34

The Birth and Youth of Esau and Jacob

¹⁹ These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, ²⁰ and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. ²¹ Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. ²² The children struggled together within her; and she said, 'If it is to be this way, why do I live?' So, she went to inquire of the Lord. ²³ And the Lord said to her,

'Two nations are in your womb,
 and two peoples born of you shall be divided;
 one shall be stronger than the other,
 the elder shall serve the younger.'

²⁴ When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵ The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. ²⁶ Afterwards his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

²⁷ When the boys grew up, Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. ²⁸ Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Esau Sells His Birthright

²⁹ Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. ³⁰ Esau said to Jacob, 'Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!' (Therefore he was called Edom.) ³¹ Jacob said, 'First sell me your birthright.' ³² Esau said, 'I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?' ³³ Jacob said, 'Swear to me first.' So he [Esau] swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Psalm 119.105-112

¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet
 and a light to my path.
¹⁰⁶ I have sworn an oath and confirmed it,
 to observe your righteous ordinances.
¹⁰⁷ I am severely afflicted;
 give me life, O Lord, according to your word.
¹⁰⁸ Accept my offerings of praise, O Lord,
 and teach me your ordinances.

- ¹⁰⁹ I hold my life in my hand continually,
but I do not forget your law.
- ¹¹⁰ The wicked have laid a snare for me,
but I do not stray from your precepts.
- ¹¹¹ Your decrees are my heritage for ever;
they are the joy of my heart.
- ¹¹² I incline my heart to perform your statutes
for ever, to the end.

Romans 8.1-11

Life in the Spirit

8¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Matthew 13.1-9 (10-17) 18-23

The Parable of the Sower

13¹ That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. ² Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A Sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ Let anyone with ears listen!'

The Purpose of the Parables

¹⁰ Then the disciples came and asked him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' ¹¹ He answered, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ¹³ The reason I speak to them in parables is that "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do

not listen, nor do they understand.”¹⁴ With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

*“You will indeed listen, but never understand,
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.*

*¹⁵ For this people’s heart has grown dull,
and their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
so that they might not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and understand with their heart and turn—
and I would heal them.”*

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷ Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

The Parable of the Sower Explained

¹⁸ ‘Hear then the parable of the Sower. ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³ But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.’

Sentence

The words you have spoken are spirit and life,
O Lord; you have the words of eternal life. John 6.63, 68

SERMON

Most, if not all of us have heard today’s gospel passage at least once before, a problem when we hear the same passage time and time again is that we begin to skip read or listen. The passage today included only two of three parts,

1. Verses 1-9 Jesus telling a parable-the story, to the crowd.
2. Verses 10-17 the part excluded where Jesus explains to the disciples why he teaches using parables. And,
3. Verses 18-23 Jesus explaining to the disciples the stories meaning.

Jesus telling of stories was always to make a point for the listener so, he spoke in contexts that they would relate to, but why speak in parables? Simply it enabled him to tell the same message to different contexts. Although many things may be similar there is always difference, be it cultural, linguistic, or even the passage of time.

The act of planting a crop in Jesus’ time looked very different to the mechanised processes of today farming. Yet the purpose and principal steps remain. Sowing was

typically done by hand, *broadcast style* before being ploughed into the earth. Today the soil is opened, seed sowed then covered. Equipment was less precise or capable compared to modern machinery. As a result, crops faced greater challenges to reach harvest. The same soil types Jesus refers too, remain as considerations for farmers but with modern technology and management we see less negative impact as problems are dealt with.

If we consider the reality that the journey taken by the word to be known has meant that it has not practically been available to everyone on equal terms, we see the reason Jesus uses this parable. Life is about encountering difference; we are all at different stages on our faith journeys and relationship with Jesus. This parable is about difference, the difference in how the seed, the word is received and the consequence if corrective action is not taken.

From where you are, look around, notice the people about you, consider the people you share space with at home or when in public spaces. No two of us are the same. Each one of us is unique in creation, you could say we are who we are by chance, just as upon which ground surface type the sown seed lands is random. This randomness will influence our engagement with the world. Understanding also how each ground surface types represents a possible response to the word, the seeds represent us, and the birds, shallow earth, the thorns represent the nature of humanity and its susceptibility to sin, let's consider the passage.

1. Pathway- this is soil that has been packed down and becomes hard. It may be rich with nutrient, but the seed remains atop the surface where it is quickly taken by birds. The seed has no chance. It is taken by birds before it realises any opportunity. This is the person who through self-belief and deceit is ignorant of truth and so is unwilling to change.
2. Rocky shallow soil- while they are quick to sprout, they fail to establish root and so wither in the sun. These are people whose excitement rises quickly but is superficial. They lack foundation and so when things get hard, they lack willpower and move to some other exciting thing.
3. Thorns – choke weeds. These people do not want to ignore Jesus they are just Duplicitous, wanting what God offers and what the world offers. These people hear and want to accept the word, but they are also wanting wealth, power, prestige, security beyond essential need. They seek these worldly things out unwilling to let go of trusting materialism and prestige. The tragedy here is that unlike the prior examples of pathway and rocky ground, the turning away from God is insidiously slow. It often takes a lifetime and so we are blinded, deceived into rationalising our behaviour. Lantana, introduced to Australia as a hedge plant, is a grazier's nightmare it kills stock, is as hardy as stone, invasive as water but so beautiful in flower. Where it grows the ground is useless for farming but deceptively nice to look at.
4. Good soil- These are the people who hear and understand the word. Able to focus their energy on the requirements of the word they produce sustainable growth.

These people balance the needs of this life with sustaining a relationship with the Word. Interestingly the measure of success of this growth is not the same for everybody. This makes sense again given none of us are identical we each poses unique gifts with which to contribute to the greater whole of the kingdom.

So what makes the good ground good?

Good cropping ground needs to be firm enough to support the crop while being friable enough for root establishment. It needs to be rich with nutrient and able to free this up for the plant. It needs to be free of weeds and rocks. These things require the farmer to take time to select the best space, prepare the soil and once sown to monitor and nurse the growth of the crop.

Note how similar the task of the farmer to the requirement of a parent raising a child, a teacher or mentor guiding a student or God wanting relationship with us. Love is the soil that is just right, firm but friable. Trust develops, relationship grows as depth of awareness and knowing is reached. In time a healthy co-dependency where one actively seeks out the other to be whole or better know oneself is achieved. This is part of why we grieve when loss occurs. When challenges confront us and we are able even through toughest experiences to know hope.

Of course, human lives are not without challenges. We are not one dimensional. The soil types of our hearts may vary between the different dimensions of our life. Often, we can be surprised by the unexpected and even with our best efforts we find ourselves reacting in ways that shame us – especially to ourselves. These are times when we must check the type of ground upon which we find ourselves. Conditions of the heart can change, and sin does not typically spring in – it creeps like Lantana. Good soil can become shallow if not managed.

While the cost of inaction is death. The loss of relationship with God through Jesus, it is not God's plan that any should fail. By God's grace, Jesus who died for our sin was raised from death stand as our voice before God. Through faith in Jesus, commitment to understanding scripture in our lives, attention to our spiritual and prayer life and doing the best we can each with our unique gifts, even the hardest earth can be made ready for sowing.

Share your relationship with Jesus and all it brings to you with others. Sow the seed of faith in their hearts by just letting them know how your faith strengthens you. Trust God to do the farming. AMEN