

## Reflection for Sunday 12 July 2020

Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23

Many of us have tried to keep to a daily routine of exercise during the weeks of lock-down. One of the regular walks we enjoy is along a public footpath which edges a tract of farmland. It has felt good to observe something of the cycle of the spring and summer seasons. In March, the field was bare earth, ploughed and ready for planting. By April, we could see a faint haze of green and by May, the sturdy shoots were well through the soil and growing fast. In June, the crop was flourishing and ripening. And when we were there a few days ago, the grain had been harvested. The work of sowing and planting had come to fruition and the work was done.

Even though most of us have no direct connection with the land, we respect the commitment to good land management. And walking in the fields still feels wholesome and grounding!



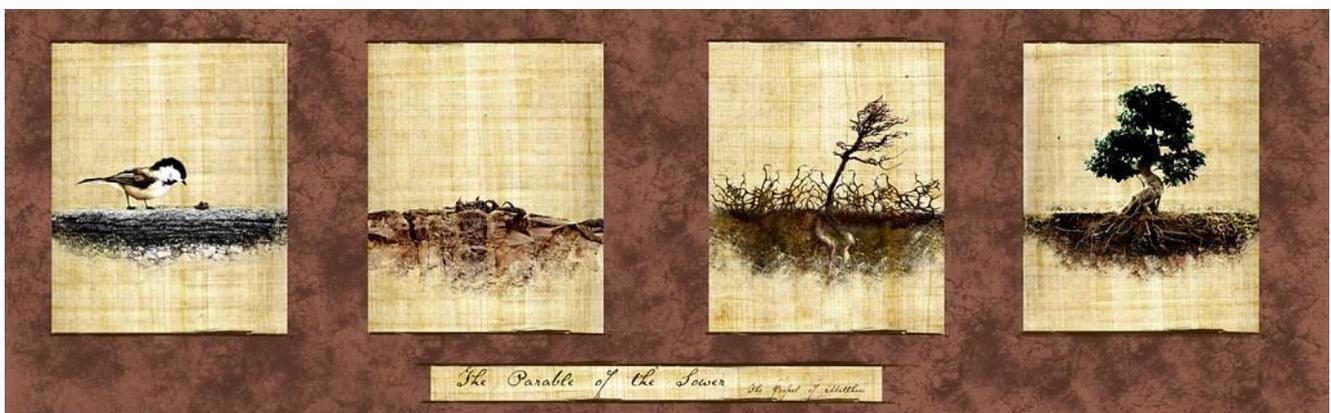
In our gospel reading for today, the crowds of people who had come to listen to Jesus would be fully in tune with the rhythm of the seasons and working the land. As Jesus told the parable, there would have been immediate interest, and a real understanding of the successes and failures of the farming life he described

Good soil was valuable and precious, hard-won from the terraces built into the rocky hillsides. The land fit for planting was separated by strips of hard-packed earth which couldn't be ploughed. The work of keeping the wilderness of weeds and thorns in check, was an on-going battle if there was to be a good harvest.

Huge crowds had gathered to hear Jesus, the exciting new preacher heralded by John the Baptist, who announced that the kingdom of God was at hand. There were very different ideas as to what the Messiah would be like and how the kingdom of God would be manifested. So against that background of conflicting expectations, Jesus chose to

connect with them through a parable firmly rooted in their common experience of everyday working life.

No heavy hand forced the good news on those in the crowd, just as the seed is not forced into the soil. But if soil is unprepared, the seed will not take root, nor will it flourish and grow. Jesus told the story to create a sense of readiness. He used the parable to plant the seeds of the kingdom, quietly and gently, in the hearts of those who would listen to him. Jesus scattered the seeds liberally and generously. He sowed the seeds far and wide, even if some would fall in places which proved to be unfruitful. Working to bring seed to a good harvest will always involve hard work, trials and failures alongside success.



The parable makes for a good story. We enjoy it now as much as the crowds who came to Jesus. But the parable is not told just to entertain, or comment on the ups and downs of working the land. Jesus told the parable to invite a loving response. Jesus wants us to understand and to act on all we hear and see. He asks for a ready heart to recognise our need for forgiveness; he asks that we might live generously for others as he did for us. He questions how ready are we to nurture the seeds of the kingdom sown in us.

A parable will always engage us, but it also invites us to write our own ending. So, if we accept the word and seek to understand it, bear fruit and add to a bountiful harvest, what an exciting story it will turn out to be!

*Rowena Ashworth*