

## Sermon for the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost Year A

Lismore Anglicans, Sunday 16 July 2023

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Recently I attended the opening of a new ELC at Lindisfarne Anglican Grammar School at Tweed Heads. As part of the opening we were invited to participate in an Indigenous Smoking Ceremony. The man who conducted the ceremony spoke about the place of fire in indigenous culture.

For most non-Indigenous, urban and even agricultural people, fire is perceived as a destructive force. However, fire holds great spiritual meaning in Aboriginal culture, with many stories, memories and dance being passed down around the fire. Fire also connects Indigenous people to the land. He said fire represents, amongst other things, new life. It unlocks the potential for growth.

In today's Gospel parable, the Parable of the Sower (Mt 13:1-9, 18-23), the seed (representing the Good News) is sown liberally. Where it lands varies: in three unfruitful places - "on the path" – where it is eaten (v. 4), "among rocks" – where it has no root (v. 5), "among thorns" - where it is strangled (v. 7); and in one fruitful place, in "good soil", where it flourishes (v. 8).

Maybe we need an Australian version of the parable, where the seed falls on Australian Country, and is exposed to bushfire.

Australian Wattle for example reveals the amazing resilience of our native flora, with many plants relying on fire to germinate and growing strongly.

Wattles are the great Aussie survivors and produce large quantities of hard black seeds, which the ants often carry off and bury. Seeds are stored in the soil. The heat of bushfires cracks the hard seed coat and promotes germination and the next generation starts.



Wattles seeds can live in the soil for decades. *Fire unlocks their potential for growth* – even after years of being dormant. But the wattle story isn't finished there – as some of the important first colonisers after a fire, they are *soil improvers* able to use special root nodules to extract nitrogen from the air and return it to the soil.

If we were allowed to take some liberty with the parable in this way, then seed sown by the sower falling on this bushfire prone ground would be exposed to trial by fire – but this would help it to burst open and grow. And the seed, once growing, would actually improve whatever soil it has landed in.

The parable is about the Good News of God, about its sowing and about what conditions might help it take root and bear fruit.

What is life giving for you?

What conditions have encouraged God's love, hope and new life to flourish and grow in you?

Has adversity strangled God's message for you? – has hardness, rockiness or resistance *held it back*, or *challenged it to grow*?



What speaks to you in this parable? What surprises or stands out?

For me, there are two things that stand out.

Firstly, I feel drawn to begin with Jesus' clear injunction in verse 9: *Let anyone with ears, listen!* The verb *to listen* [ἀκούέτω – to hear, heed or obey] is in the present (active imperative) tense.

To hear God's Word is not a one-time occurrence but an ongoing characteristic of discipleship. **Listening** is essential to discipleship.

What did you hear in the parable?

Where are you in this parable?

When and how have you felt all of these responses to God's Word?

Hearing God's word has had different effects on us at different times. God's word, or the seed of his Word as sown by the Spirit is not static but dynamic. Not fixed but ever meaningful.

While Jesus has invited listening (v. 9), *understanding* (vv. 19, 23) is required in order to be fruitful: reflect on Jesus' message. Those who brush off the message are easily seduced (v. 19). Vv. 20-21 also speak of lack of understanding: of superficiality, of reflecting insufficiently. Discipleship is demanding. Finally v. 23: only those who adequately reflect (thus coming to understanding), who meet the demands of the faith, and who are truly dedicated are fruitful and bring others to Christ.

It's about what the hearing creates in you. When we let the good news sink in deep and take hold of our hearts in such a way that it changes our lives. We become not just soil, but the wildly growing garden of God, bearing fruit upon fruit upon fruit.

The other thing that stands out for me is the incredible **generosity** of the farmer. A farmer who goes out to sow seed. There's nothing surprising about that; Farmers sow seed all the time. Good seed is hard to come by; the wise farmer makes sure to entrust the precious grain they have to the best soil.

Yet God, of course, is this generous farmer and sower of seed, and he is depicted as being more concerned *about the seed getting out* than making sure it lands in certain places. In short, this farmer behaves as though that which were most precious was available in unlimited supply. The seed bag appears to be bottomless - the sower is not called out as foolish for wasting it.

God sends the message of the Kingdom as a seed that might grow and blossom in the lives of people, and he sends it without a care about the quality, readiness, acceptability, or receptivity of the person. Everyone has access to the seed that is the gospel good news.

The kingdom of God has come among us. God has blessed us richly, and God's people have been entrusted with that which is most precious in the world. The seed of God's word only bears fruit – when it is scattered absolutely heedless of who is worthy to receive it.

We are called to imitate the reckless generosity of the farmer and sower of seed: The parable of the sower calls you to sow seeds of grace and mercy over new ground--worried not over where it will land--concerned only with casting as much seed as possible--leaving all the rest up to God.

If we turn briefly to the Romans reading, we hear St Paul talking about what are effectively two mindsets, one self-oriented and the other Spirit-oriented, one leading to the finality of "death", and one to spiritual "life". Christians are motivated by the Spirit (v. 9), and belong to God. "Spirit" and "Christ" come together. If Christ (or the Spirit) is in you, you are alive – because of the Spirit (v. 10-11).

The parable is about the generous, Spirit oriented sowing of seed and about how we receive the Good News in our lives. We can't always control the context or soil type of our lives. The seeds of the Word (*semina verbi*) are sown generously, even recklessly, by the Spirit. They fall on us when we are ready and receptive, and when we are distracted or tangled up with the cares of the world, or when we need some kind of challenge that might release their potential in us.

May the seed of the Word release in you the new life of Christ and may you, like the Spirit, be a generous sower of seed.

*Lord of the harvest, generous sower of seeds: Grant that our hearts might not be so hardened by the world that the seed can take no root, nor so shallow that the roots can find no depth; nor so encumbered with the cares of the world that the growing shoots are choked; but that we may be good ground, bearing good fruit, to the glory of your name. Amen.*

From Parish Prayers, Frank Colquhoun