

Reflection Wednesday 10th February

Luke 8:4-15

⁴When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: ⁵"A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. ⁶Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. ⁷Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. ⁸Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold." As he said this, he called out, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" ⁹Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant. ¹⁰He said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that 'looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand.'" ¹¹"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹²The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. ¹⁴As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. ¹⁵But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.

Do you ever get despondent with life around the Church? Do you look around and think of the people who used to sit beside and around you? Now there are empty seats despite there being fewer churches as well?

Near the end of a Methodist Minister's "active" ministry, he or she asks permission of ministerial colleagues at Synod permission "to sit down." We have some wonderful terms within the life of the Church. Basically the question is asked can I have permission to no longer "travel" at the discretion of the Methodist Conference around the country – or in lay terms, retire and take a pension. At that time the person is normally invited to say something about their years of ministry.

I have attended a number of such Synod's where that has happened – about 30 – and there are some occasions that stand out. There was one occasion where the presbyter spoke about the number of chapels that had closed under his ministry; in every appointment he had overseen the closure of at least one congregation/church. It looked as though his ministry had been full of failure. It had not; the closure of chapels was not about failings in his ministry it was about responding to the situation in which he was serving in such a way that the Kingdom could grow.

In the previous chapters of Luke's gospel we find Jesus sharing his message of the kingdom with a number of people from different parts of the community. In the synagogue of Nazareth he spoke on the passage from Isaiah and the people were amazed initially at what he said and then they became furious and drove him out town.

He is at table with a Pharisee who cannot accept the Kingdom values Jesus speaks of.

Yet Levi, the tax collector, a Centurion, a sinful woman and other women – the outcasts of society heard the message and responded positively. It was in this context that the parable of the sower is told.

Not all who heard Jesus directly responded positively; we cannot expect to do better.

Yet are there things we can do? Can we be sowers of seed with a more generous distribution and further afield? Do we recognise good soil or do we think we know what is good soil? I am no gardener but I have watched enough gardening programmes and visited enough garden centres to know that some plants are very fussy about their soil and position in a garden.

Where is the good soil for the seed to fall – it may not be where we think it is? Are there things we can do to improve the ground about? Are there rocks and stones which we can remove? Are there thorn-bushes and thistles that we can deal with? How can we be sowers of the seed that produces fruit in abundance? How can we sow seed that will be taken up in different communities to grow and flourish.

As has been said on a number of occasions "if you keep on doing what you have been doing in the same way do not be surprised when you end up with the same results."