

Sermon for 6th July 2014

Refs: Isaiah 55 10-13, & Matthew 13 1-9, 18-23

Some great readings for our Flower Festival weekend. (God moves in a mysterious ways as I managed to select next week's readings in error!)

The Lord spoke through the Prophet Isaiah saying, in effect, 'Just as the rain and snow come down from heaven and water the earth causing things to sprout, grow flower and fruit, so when my word is uttered it, likewise, accomplishes the purpose for which I spoke it'.

Even in the Gospel's Parable of the Sower – the seeds representing God's word uttered, produce the purpose for which they were scattered – although it has to be said, that was not so everywhere it was sown.

Despite 75% of fruitless (bad) ground, the 30-100 fold increase in the good ground made it more than worthwhile sowing the seeds.

The parable, reflecting much of God's approach to His creative acts, reveals God's generosity – every 'ground' gets an equal outpouring of God's productive word. As Jesus said 'The sun shines on the righteous and unrighteous alike.'

He sends rain on both good and evil people. He is abundantly kind and merciful.

This is the first point for today – God pours out his love and mercy on the whole world – on all people – there is no one beyond his love however wicked or deluded they may have become.

The abundance of beauty and variety evident here today is testimony to that.

This is at the heart of our Ethos at All Saints: all are welcome – we don't keep out bad people.

How would it be if we had a sign – 'The righteous and unrighteous alike are welcome to receive God's blessings here'?

Actually, it's really difficult to tell who are the righteous and who are not. We don't have a test to filter out the unrighteous. Anyway, one could argue that this is a place especially for sinners as repentance and forgiveness are at the heart of the Christian message, the cross being a poignant reminder of that

As Jesus put it, I have come for the unrighteous – for the righteous have no need of repentance. Perhaps we should have a sign – 'Only sinners welcome!'

Actually, that probably wouldn't make any difference as we all know we all fall well short of perfection. It might even grow the church.

Can you envisage a big banner over the West door (when it's open) 'Only Sinners Welcome!' It'd be interesting to note who will cease coming.

But in truth, all are welcome – the righteous and unrighteous alike because that reflects the reality of God's graciousness and unconditional love. Indeed the sun

shines on both the righteous and unrighteous just as the sower sowed the good seed – the word of God – on good and bad ground alike.

Illustration – “Listen! A sower went out to sow” (Matthew 13:3)

When a parish church was celebrating the 150th anniversary of its consecration, a special service was planned and the bishop was asked to come and preach. The bishop said he would be delighted to come. He wrote a sermon that was a perfect combination of anecdotes, symbolism and deep theology. The day of the service arrived and the church was crowded with people, celebrating joyously, singing hymns with great enthusiasm and seeming to enjoy the bishop’s sermon.

After the service the bishop stood at the back of the church greeting people: two in particular stuck in his memory. First was a lady who came to church every Sunday and sat in the front row; she approached the bishop and said, “Bishop, throughout your sermon I was trying to work it out, something I couldn’t quite grasp, but then it hit me.” The bishop was filled with joy that the woman had clearly thought so much about the sermon until she said, “Something is different about you, you’ve got new glasses, haven’t you?”

The bishop’s heart sank; but then he spoke with a man who said “I stopped coming to this church when I was a teenager, never really thought that it was my thing, but I thought I’d come today because everybody else seemed to be going. What you said really spoke to me; I think if I’m honest I’d never really listened before. I think I could really put some roots down here again.”

The same is true of those who visit this Arts and Spirituality flower festival – as indeed it is for those doing the flowers. Some will receive the Word as the displays are contemplated, others won’t.

But for the good ground in which the seed of the Word falls it’ll be more than worth all the effort, for, in due season, in those people it will produce 30, 60, hundred times what was sown.

For, ‘As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
And do not return there until they have watered the earth,
Making it bring forth and sprout,
Giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
It shall not return to me empty,
But it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
And succeed in the thing for which I sent it.’ **Isaiah 55 10-13**

Those lives will be changed by this event; as for the rest – it will pass them by as if the rain came and nothing sprouted or grew to maturity.

I wonder who will be fruitful as a result of this Flower Festival?

Thank you to all.