

The Fifteenth Sunday of the Year.

A drive, or better a walk, across our parish in any direction will reveal many different types of agriculture. One thing they have in common and that is their efficiency. Because of developed farming techniques every piece of ground is farmed in the best way possible, avoiding pests and diseases to produce a good return and crop. In this parish we have a college at Sparsholt which majors in developing the best ways to manage farms.

Hampshire production is in stark contrast to the agriculture of Jesus' time in Palestine and to the sower in the parable that Jesus invites us to imagine.

So let's imagine him going out to sow broadcasting the seed so that it fell in all kinds of unlikely and hopeless places. Some for the birds to eat, some on patches of rock, some among thorns and there was no future in any of these. Some fell on the soil where it produced a hundred, or sixty or thirtyfold. I understand that if a seed produces an eightfold harvest, the farmer thinks that he is doing very well.

Notice how the parable is beginning to take us away from farming, either in the dry scorched land of Palestine or the green and lush central Hampshire. Jesus is using the image of soil and seeds to take us into the way in which God operates with us. Two things stand out. The first is that God is generous to the point of wastefulness as the seed is thrown in all directions. That is what God is like. He loves us so much that is generosity knows no bounds. Then there is the harvest. The presence and power of God in our lives achieves far more success and benefit than we can attain through our own efforts without him.

Jesus, as he reminds us, is talking about the mysteries of the kingdom. He wants us to be drawn more deeply into his way of working. He wants us to shape our lives on the gift and presence of the Word of the Kingdom which is being poured into our lives and experience during every second of our existence. The Kingdom is all about God's message of life and love, his purpose for the fullness of human life and creation, becoming recognisable and available in us. This is the meaning of Baptism and the Eucharist. That in eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Christ we become members of the risen Body of Christ so that the presence of his risen life might be seen in us in works of love and in the dignity and balance of our humanity; in people who are fully alive, and who have been made whole.

The key issue is the soil. The place where the seed lands or, in other words, the fertility and openness of the human being to the divine purpose and presence. The quality of the ground is our response in life to the invitation of God to receive the Word of God and put it into practice.

So every human being is given this communication with God which stirs us deep within our minds and hearts. Within every human life there is a channel of communication with God which we call his Word to us, the Word of the Kingdom.

All of us, says St. Paul, possess the first fruits of the Spirit and we groan inwardly as we wait for our bodies to be set free. The Word of the Kingdom, which is spoken to all of us, is about freedom and it is in freedom that we recognise its call in our hearts.

All of us will be acutely aware that that our relationship with Jesus is not something that everyone experiences as we do. We acknowledge in faith that God plants the seed of his word in the soil of our lives and it follows that there is some responsibility required of us if that seed is to grow, if his word is to take root in our lives. To accept

that responsibility is to make a priority of our relationship with Jesus and to consider it as the most important things in our lives. If we do that it follows that all the things that occupy us in life, the pleasures, the pursuits, the anxieties and the distress, even the way we use our time and emotional energy, must be regulated by our personal spirituality and the aspects of it that we consider to be most important. I mean of course the time we give to prayer, to weekly Sunday Eucharist, to our responsibilities in charity and to promote peace in our relationships and within ourselves. And how are we to recognise the seed, the Word of the Kingdom that is constantly being spoken to us by the Holy Spirit who dwells with us and within us.

We recognise the Word of the Kingdom by being attentive to those movements and feelings within us which lead us to change and turn away from our resistance to God. So often the centres for that change will be indicated by fear and turmoil which points us to turn away from ourselves and find healing in God.

We recognise the Word and mystery of the Kingdom in our relationships and our dealings with others. The Lord will always be calling us to deeper acceptance of one another in love, especially in those relationships where there is fear, envy or some other kind of resistance to the self-giving and respect which loves demands.

We recognise our work for the Kingdom in the call to be grateful for creation and to treat it with the respect and sensitivity that its God given nature requires.

We recognise the Lord's call in those situations where trust in confidence in God's goodness will bring a peace and release from the situations that cause us worry and stress.

We recognise the Lord's communication within ourselves by renewing our conviction that 'As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do.'