

St Alban's  
Church

Anglican Parish  
of Eastbourne



## The Seeds of the Kingdom: Part One

Rev Canon Dr Eleanor Sanderson

12<sup>th</sup> February 2017

*Deuteronomy 30:15-end*

*1 Corinthians 3:1-9*

*Matthew 5:21-37*

This week and next week we are going to reflect together on what it means for the seeds of the Kingdom of God to be planted in our lives. I am going to end by speaking in relation to our scriptures and I am going to start by speaking in story telling form another story from our Gospel.

This is one of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd stories that I share here with our junior school and the figures that we use are here at the foot of our altar for you to see when you come and receive Communion. But for now, I invite you to close your eyes as you hear this story and imagine it coming alive in your mind's eye.

Jesus told a story to the people to help them understand the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom, said Jesus, is like a person sowing seeds. The sower went out to the fields to sow lots of seeds. She sowed lots and lots of seeds. As she scattered the seeds before her, the seeds landed in lots of different places. Some seeds landed on the path. On this hard ground these seeds couldn't find any soil to

grow and so they couldn't grow at all. Other seeds fell where there was only shallow soil. These seeds could start to grow, but they didn't grow very deep and so when the birds came they could easily eat up the seeds and carry them away. So these seeds did not grow either. Some other seeds fell on deep soil where there were also many weeds. Here these seeds started to grow well, but the weeds made it very difficult for the seeds to get the sunshine and nourishment that they needed and so they withered away before they had chance to fully grow. Then some other seeds fell on ground that was rich in soil, had no rocks, no weeds and no bird could steal them away from their depth. These seeds grew. They grew and grew and as they grew into beautiful plants the plants produced more seeds, many, many more seeds; a rich harvest that delighted the sower with so many seeds to keep generously sowing.

You might like to open your eyes now. After telling that story, which the children watch being acted out through the figures, we wonder about its meaning together. These young boys quickly make the connection between this story and their attitude of learning. And after we have talked about the ways that they learn well, I tell them how Jesus explained this story. The path, is the hardness of hearts and spirits that are not open to the Kingdom of God. The shallow soil is where people learn a little bit and receive the good news of God, but don't hunger to keep learning and so their soil never goes deep enough and the kingdom seeds are easily taken out of their lives. The weeds are the cares of this world, the love of other kingdoms, such as the love of money, which takes over and so the kingdom seeds are not able to be fed and nourished while the weeds are allowed to grow. And then the rich deep soil is where our hearts, our lives, our souls cultivate, prioritise and live for the kingdom of God; where we

hold first the Kingdom of God, embrace it with all that we have and see it flourish and grow and then multiply and be shared.

We make these choices every day of our lives. We are the different places where the generous sower scatters the seeds. How we respond, dictates how the seeds grow. We, like the people of Israel, always have the choice to make between life and death, between the things that bring life to ourselves and to others or the things that choke life in ourselves and prevent the life of God flowing more abundantly in ours and other people's lives.

Our Gospel today is a section of Jesus' teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount. The sermon on the mount is often depicted as a partner to the giving of the Ten Commandments in the First Testament. It is the gift of the Law and the Ten Commandments that Moses is referring to in our first reading today, when he challenges the people by saying, choose this day whom you will serve, choose life or death. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus initiates the Beatitudes, the beautiful attitudes (blessed are the poor...) and in their context, he then enlivens the Ten Commandment in a fresh way. Now would you give me the grace to oversimplify this whole section that we have heard today? It is not about how much you can get away with, if that is your attitude, you are completely missing the point! You are not choosing life, you are choosing many little deaths.

God's Kingdom comes on earth when we let the seeds of faith, seeds which we can find scattered generously all through our lives, when we let these seeds grow. And as any gardener will tell you, it takes care, intention, love, patience and nourishment for seeds to grow to full maturity. It doesn't just happen. It also takes a lot of energy to weed. If you don't weed your garden, the weeds will take over.

In our Epistle reading today, we hear Paul speaking about that care of the seeds of faith that he gave his life for. The planting and the watering and the ploughing. They are all important, but Paul puts it all into perspective when he says ..."So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labour of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9)

You are God's field. You are God's building.

And we, when we hold those precious, generously sown seeds of faith in our hands, have choices to make every day about how they are brought to life. We must choose life or death. And in that place of decision I am reminded of the humble prayer by the thief on the cross who hung next to Jesus and Jesus died to death for us all. Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom. It is God who gives the growth. It is God who brings life out of the many deaths that are always possible within us and around us. It is God who can turn one tiny seed of faith, a seed as small as mustard, into a bountiful harvest. It is God who gives the growth. You are God's field. You are God's building. It is God who gives the growth.

I invite you to sing with me as we pray;

Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.