

Trinity 5 - Proper 15
Sunday 12.07.2020
Isaiah 55: 10 – 13; Matthew 13: 1 – 9, 18 – 23
Preparing the Ground.

Do you miss church? I do.

I know that God is present everywhere, I say a daily office, I read my Bible, I pray, I sing along to worship CDs, all at home. I do all that, I don't miss God, he's always with me, I miss all of you. I miss meeting with you, praying together, worshipping together, celebrating the presence of God in the Eucharist together, and chatting together after the service.



Like many others during these last few months we have been gardening. It's not a new exercise for us but we've certainly done more of it than ever before. Something that *has* been new is growing from seed. We sowed tomato, lettuce, vegetable and flower seeds. Although some things were more successful than others we have a good crop of lettuces, some healthy tomato plants, some parsnips and turnips, and a nice display of flowers.

The image of God the Gardener is not as well-known as the Good Shepherd perhaps but it is one that seems appropriate for our time and Jesus uses it a few times in different ways. Remember the True Vine (John 15); the fig-tree parable (Luke 13); the fruit bearing trees (Luke 6). Several of the Old Testament prophets, including Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, use vines and vineyards in their prophecies, and, of course, in Revelation we have the harvest at the end of time (Revelation 14).

As any gardener worth their salt will tell you, the key to success is preparing the ground properly. The sower in today's gospel story appears a little profligate in the way he tosses around his seed with it falling all over the place, on the path; on rocky ground; amongst the thorns, as well as on good, fertile ground. This broadcast method of sowing however, was what was in use at the time and those listening to



Jesus would have understood what was happening and also known what had happened before the seed was sown. The sower had done his groundwork, he had prepared an area off the path, he removed from it all the stones and weeds which would cause problems for his seeds and, although he lost some of those seeds he ended up with a good crop in his

fertile prepared ground.


This is another reason I miss church. Being with the community of like-minded or maybe that should be like-faithed, people is where the groundwork for our lives is done. The teaching, the worshipping, the chatting together help to identify the things in our lives that we need to remove – or allow God to remove – so that we are the fertile ground in which God can plant his word. If we are not good ground in which roots can go deep and faith grow strong then we will not live our lives according to God's guidance, we will not bear fruit for God. We will not be an effective part of *Missio Dei*, God's mission, which we are meant to be because we are also sowers. As God sows into our lives so we, with the help of the Holy Spirit, sow into the lives of others. This parable serves as a warning that we won't always succeed. Three of the four responses to the gospel in this parable are negative but we still need to prepare the ground, to sow, to water with prayer, and allow God to work. We can take heart from the Isaiah reading:

It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it. (Is 55 v 11)

Nothing God does is wasted, nothing that we do with God and for God is wasted. Even though I feel that my groundwork hasn't been as good as it could have been over these last few months God is still in control.

Maybe for you it is different but for me online worship just does not work. I don't have the same sense of community with an online service as I do in church so I am delighted with the announcement on Thursday that here in Scotland we will soon be able to meet together again. It will be different and for some it will be difficult. The bishops have issued guidelines to help us come back together safely but there is still wariness about being with so many people after all this time of limited contact. The groundwork has to be done here too, both in our churches to prepare them for re-opening and in our own lives to prepare us to be together again. Our faith has brought us this far during the pandemic, now we need to let it help us through the next stages too.

If we had been worshipping together today the obvious recessional song – if we were allowed to sing – would have been the one based upon verse 12 of our Isaiah reading. I look forward to the time when we will be able to sing to each other

 You shall go out with joy
and be led forth with peace.

Helen Evans