

Listen and Respond

Mark's Gospel wastes no time
Or energy in getting down to business
An event has taken place
That radically changes
The way we look at
And experience the World.

In Mark 1 verse 15,

Jesus proclaims the Good News of God

“The Time has come” he said

In other words,

“Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God”

One of the most familiar
Characteristics of Jesus' teaching ministry
Was his use of Parables.

Our Parable Today is from Mark 4
And is more commonly known
As the “Kingdom Parables”

It is the story of the

“Seed and the Sower”

And more often referred to as **“Good Seed”**.

As we examine the 4 kinds of soil
Given to us we can ask

“What part of the Parable

Are we living out today?”.

Jesus was faced with a problem
Similar to that

Which often confronts the Church today.

How do we reach people

Who have closed minds?.

How do you make people

Who have preconceived ideas

About God and indeed life itself.

Examine those preconceptions

And ask Deeper Questions?.

You see, a Parable
 Would awake new interest,
 Stimulate fresh thought,
 And force people to examine old ideas.

What a fantastic pace Technology
 Has moved in recent years
 We have moved from Analogue to Digital
 From an Audio to a Visual Generation
 And soon from High Definition to 3-D

Listening has become
 A Lost art or Skill.
 Then we wonder why families
 And church fellowships cannot communicate.
 There are many voices calling us
 And demanding our Love and Loyalty
 How do we hear the Word of God
 Amidst them All?

Well, here's how, By Hearing.
 The ability to Listen
 Is just as vital now
 As it was in Biblical times.

Jesus and the 12 disciples
 Had been planting and scattering Seed
 For only a short time
 When they painfully discovered
 The Birds, the Rocks, and Thorns
 Underlining a stark realisation
 That opposition had already raised its head.

You see, the Culture in which
 The Disciples were nurtured
 Worshipped and Adored
 The Large and the Powerful.
 They despised the small and Powerless.

The disciples were surrounded by
 The Power and might
 Of the Roman Empire and Kingdom,
 Jesus is training them
 To go into the World
 To build **HIS Kingdom.**

Then he challenges them
 By Talking about Seeds
 And mustard seeds at that.
 He never mentioned sharp swords
 And swift stallions.
 So this Kingdom talk about Seeds
 Didn't go down too well with them.

What the disciples had to learn then
 And all Jesus' followers from then on
 Was That in the Kingdom of God
Our Worth,
Our Value,
Our Strength,
Comes from God
And no-one else.

A Seed in the Hand of a Sovereign God
 Can forever Change
 The Course of History.

It was Interesting that one of our National Newspapers
 Last month must have had this Parable in mind
 When they ran a promotion
 Of not only Dropping the price of the newspaper
 But giving out free packets of vegetable seeds
 Why? In order to Grow the Business.

So today we come
 To the familiar Parable
 That many of us no doubt
 Learned in Sunday School or Youth Church.
 And it is the first parable
 That we encounter in Mark's Gospel.

The word "**Seed**" in verse 4
 Is a symbol for the inspired Word
 Of the Living God.
 It has **Power** and **Potential**
 In its very nature and design.

So hold onto your Pews, folks,
 Jesus' Parables are Spiritual time-bombs
 One Preacher abbreviated the New Testament
 As **TNT**, it was **Explosive**

On the surface they seemed
 Like harmless stories
 But in Time,
 They **Exploded** with Powerful meaning.

A Parable is one of the stories in the Bible
 Which sounds at first to be like a pleasant yarn
 But keeps something up its sleeve
 Which suddenly pops up
 And knocks you flat

They inevitably contain the element of Surprise
 And the Listener is left Thinking
"I never thought of it like that before".

We learnt from our early teaching
 That a Parable is an earthly story
 With a Heavenly Meaning
 Which is a good definition

But needs one clarification;
 The Heavenly meaning isn't reserved
 For the afterlife,
 But for the here and now.

So here we have,
 The Parable of the Sower.
 And it can be found in all three Gospels,
 Matthew, Mark and Luke.

It reflects farming practices in Palestine
 Where ploughing followed sowing.
 Unlike many countries today
 Where the soil is prepared
 Before planting takes place
 The seed would be scattered widely
 And then ploughed in.

Lets now get down to work
 And dig and explore
 The four kinds of soil or conditions
 Of the Human Heart
 That were common in Palestine
 In Jesus' time.

How Jesus illustrates with **4 Actions or Responses**
 To his Word on how to live a Kingdom life
As Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 Relevant not only to the disciples then
 But also to us here in Dunfermline Today.

Firstly, A Sacrificial Response.
When seed falls on Hardened Paths
Verses 4 and 15

Jesus explains about a farmer who sows his seed
“As he was scattering the seed,
Some fell along the path,

And the birds came and ate it up.
 Then his response,
**“Some people are like
 Seed along the path,
 Where the Word is sown.
 As soon as they hear it.
 Satan comes and takes away the Word
 That was sown in them.”**
 That is really no Response at all.

Farmers often left paths
 For those who travelled through their fields
 I've cycled those paths in Israel myself.
 I had the bum sores as evidence
 The ground is naturally bumpy
 And packed down.
 As the seed was so exposed,
 The birds of the air
 Would quickly eat up the seed
 That was thrown down.

One of the worst things
 That could happen to an individual
 Is to develop a **“Hard Heart”**.
 There is no room or space
 For anything else to grow
 And mature in their lives
 Except bitterness and barrenness

Helen Keller wrote,
**“There is none so Blind
 As those who refuse to see”**.

**Seeds represented the Future
 And all they wanted was the Past.**

Rick Warren in his book
 Purpose-driven Life

Believes a closed mind
 Represents actually the Condition
 Of the hardened soil or Path

**Only the Grace of God
 And the Joy of being Forgiven
 Can begin to penetrate
 This Hardened soil and heart.**

One day the Seed was dropped
 Into the hardened soil
 Of the life of Martin Luther
And the protestant Reformation was birthed.
 That same seed was replanted,
 Into the lives of
**John and Charles Wesley
 And the Wesleyan Revival took root.**

**Secondly,
 A Shallow response
 To the seed that fell on rocky soil.
 (verses 5 and 6, 16 and 17).**

Jesus continues,

**“Some fell on rocky places,
 Where it did not have much soil.
 It sprang up quickly,
 Because the soil was shallow.
 But when the sun came up,
 The plants were scorched,
 And they withered because they had no root.”**

And his response,

**“Others, like seed sown on rocky places,
 Hear the word and at once
 Receive it with Joy.”
 “But since they have no root,
 They last only a short time.
 When trouble or persecution comes
 Because of the word,
 They quickly fall away.”**

The seed here is actually planted
 And takes root
 This is not a soil that is filled with stones
 But a thin layer of soil
 Perhaps only a few centimetres deep
 Which is very common in Palestine.

When planted its roots are not deep enough
 To sustain a long commitment
 And growing season.

The seed would germinate quickly
 But, because there is no depth of soil
 As soon as the roots begin
 To search for moisture
 They would meet only rock
 And the plant would shrivel up
 In the heat and die.

Eugene Peterson,
 Reminds us it is not difficult
 To get a person interested in the Gospel
 But it is hard work to sustain an interest.
 Many who initially begin to follow Jesus
 Quickly turned away
 When he began to speak about Discipleship.

And it is no different today
 Many people have made decisions for Christ
 But there is a dreadful attrition rate
 Many claim to be born again
 But the evidence for mature
 Christian discipleship is slim.

Thirdly, A Shared Response
Some seeds fell among Thorns
(verses 7, 18 and 19)

Jesus continues by saying,
“Other seed fell among thorns,

**Which grew up and choked the plants,
So that they did not bear grain.”**

And his response,

**“Still others, like seed sown among thorns,
Hear the word but the worries of this life,
The deceitfulness of wealth
And the desires for other things
Come in and choke the word,
Making it unfruitful.”**

Here the Seed is welcomed
But so is everything else
Gods word is crowded out
By the weeds of Anxiety
Or the Thorns of Success.

It is difficult for Gods word
To be nurtured and to grow
In a Cultured or distracted mind or soil
The Latest Data reveals
That 56 % of homes in the UK
Are now online with internet

We receive an average of 42 E-mails a day
Between the home and the office.
Facebook now has 500 million
Accounts Worldwide.

It's as if God is saying
“Can you spare me some time”. (r)
All our latest gifts of Technology
Offer us information
But only the bible
Directs us to a relationship with God.

Last week an SPL football manager
Accused his players of being Lazy.
That's exactly what
The Farmers of that region were: simply Lazy
They did not work the soil

They did not go about the tough
But necessary work of weeding the fields.

A plot of land can only
Support and nourish
Only so many plants
Weeds compete for the same

Water, space and sunlight

Slowly, subtly
But just as effectively,
The seed is destroyed.

During our Planting time today
We have looked at,
The Sacrificial response,
The Shallow response,
And a Shared response

Fourthly, A Satisfactory response
When some seed fell on Good Ground
(verses 8 and 20)

So to Jesus' final point,
“Still other seed fell on good soil.
It came up, grew and produced a crop
Multiplying thirty, sixty or even a hundred times.”

And he responds by saying,
“Others, like seed sown on good soil,
Hear the word, accept it,
And produce a crop -
Thirty, sixty or even a hundred times
What was sown.”

Yes, despite the vigorous opposition
To the word
It still yields a rich harvest
This is the central teaching from this Parable today
Don't Forget The Good Soil.

Because of this assurance
 The Farmer's work
 And ours as Disciples of Christ
 Is never done.
 God does not call us to be perfect
 But to be fruitful
 And to plant the seed,

And we may never Know
 What fruit that seed
 That is sown may bear.
 Take last weekend for example,
 And the person Street Pastors
 Engaged with in the Maygate
 How the most wonderful thing in his Life
 Happened to him when,
 Someone gave him a Easter egg
 Outside the Church that is being "Done up".

There is always soil that is,
 Soft Deep and Clean
 Where the seed is received
 Nourished and grows.

Experts say that Tenfold is an average harvest
 Thirty fold is good
 Sixty fold is excellent,
 One hundred fold is Amazing!
 In spite of the Hazards and Losses
 The Sower enjoys a splendid harvest.

And finally one More Response
 A Submissive Response
 To Jesus Christ,
 Our Lord and Saviour
 The Greatest seed ever Planted.
**"The Word became flesh
 And dwelt among us
 Full of Grace and Truth".**

Jesus was able,
 To express those profound Truths
 In simple down to earth stories.
 And painted pictures in words
 For his listeners then
 And for us now.
 He would tell it in various ways,
 The Kingdom of God is like,
A Seed,
A Wedding feast,
A Treasure and so on.

He will always reveal
 Enough of Gods Truth
 For Faith to make a response
 Where there is a response
 Then more Truth can be given.

For the People of Jesus' time
 A Parable would have
 The Challenge to respond
 And the warning of Judgement
 If they failed to do so.

Let me leave you
 With this Familiar writing
Entitled "One Solitary Life."

He was born in an obscure village,
 A child of a Peasant woman.
 He grew up in another obscure village,
 Where he worked in a Carpenter's shop
 Until he was thirty.

Then for 3 years
 He was much Travelled preacher
 He never had a family
 Or owned a home.

He never set foot in a big City,
 He never travelled 200 miles
 From the place he was born
 He never wrote a book,
 Or held an office.
 He did none of these things
 That usually accompany greatness.

While he was still a young man
 The tide of popular opinion turned against him,
 His friends deserted him.
 He was turned over to his enemies
 And went through the mockery of a Trial.

He was nailed to a Cross
 Between two Thieves
 While he was dying
 His executioners gambled
 For the only piece of property he had,
 His Coat!

When he was dead,
 He was taken down
 And laid in a borrowed Grave.

Twenty Centuries have come and gone
 And today he is a central figure
 For much of the Human race

All the Armies that ever marched,
 All the Navies that ever sailed,
 All the Parliaments that ever sat
 And all the Kings, that ever reigned
 All of them Put Together,
 Have not affected the life of Man
 Upon this earth
 As powerfully as this,
“One Solitary Life”.

**That was and is the “Good Seed”.
Be sure this Good seed
Is deeply planted in your heart.**

And you know what,
The best time to plant
**This Good Seed was Yesterday
The second best time
Is Today.**