

SERMON : SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 2020

MAY the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. <Amen>

You all know “The Parable of The Sower” and as you also know, Jesus spoke in parables. It was a common way Jewish rabbis taught in those days, and Jesus followed the rabbinic tradition.

Let’s try and take this parable at face value. Sowing seeds was something Jesus’ listeners knew something about. That’s how they planted their crops. They’d take a handful of seeds and cast them out over a small area of ground, as opposed to our modern planting drills that place individual seeds in straight rows at just the right depth, so many centimetres apart.

Sowing, by comparison, is unscientific, and, by our standards, an inefficient way of getting the job done. A lot of seed is wasted. Some seed falls on the hard ground and can’t take root. Other falls on the pathway and gets stepped on. Other seed gets eaten by the birds before it can sprout. Other seed gets taken over by weeds and grass. Only a small percentage of the seed sown actually grows and bears fruit.

Yet ... in spite of everything ... the harvest was plentiful! That’s the nature of the Kingdom of God!

And that’s the Good News we need to hear. Because, when YOU consider all the “seed” that YOU sow in the course of a day or a week or a lifetime - and all that goes to waste - YOU can get pretty discouraged. YOU might even begin to despair and wonder and ask yourself, what’s the point? <PAUSE>

For example, what’s the point ... of preaching a ten-minute sermon when the average attention span is something like three minutes? I know lots of preachers who get discouraged preaching Sunday after Sunday. Does anyone really listen? Is anyone’s life ever changed for the better by what’s said in the sermon? If we dispensed with the sermon entirely, would anyone notice or care? <PAUSE>

What’s the point ... of inviting others to church when maybe one out of ten (if you’re lucky) accept your invitation? Most of our efforts for church growth fail before they get off the ground, not because there’s not enough potential church members to call on, but because we honestly don’t believe we’ll be successful. So, what’s the point? <PAUSE>

What’s the point ... of giving to Missions and charities when so little seems to change? Remember “Live Aid”? Ever wonder about that? <PAUSE>

Some of the most cynical people I know are those who’ve been ‘burned’ by trying - and failing.

We see this ‘fatigue’ a lot, even in the church - caring church members and ministers give so much for so long they just don’t have anything left inside to give. And they wonder, what’s the point? <PAUSE>

That's the attitude you're likely to take when you consider the percentages.

The Good News is that, despite the odds, God promises an abundant harvest:

**“...Some seeds fell by the roadside...Others fell on rocky ground...
Others fell among thorns...Others fell on good soil, and yielded fruit:
Some one hundred times as much...”**

In “normal times” here in this church we greet members of our extended family every day of the week. Then, they leave and we don't see them again. The parish website is read by people from all over the world. We never see them or hear from the vast majority of them.

It's hard to see what we've accomplished.

But, then, we never know. Only one success, JUST ONE, now and then, is enough to outweigh a multitude of failed attempts.

Remember, the mightiest oak tree sheds hundreds of acorns a year, but less than a handful become trees; most get eaten up by the squirrels.

Remember the greetings you all send out to friends on birthdays - you'll never know how much they mean and the impact they have. Over the years you send a lot of cards, a lot of notes, a lot of good wishes. A few, perhaps, become cherished for a lifetime.

Think about today's parable in relation to the Christian faith. Thousands of people heard and saw Jesus of Nazareth, but only a handful came to believe that he was the Son of God.

Is that all such a waste? So many pearls of wisdom go unheard. So many acts of kindness go unnoticed. So many opportunities go unaccepted. So many blessings fall through the cracks. It's enough to make you want to throw up your hands and cry, “What's the point of it all?”

Well, In spite of all the obstacles, God prevails. And the resulting harvest is abundant and plentiful for all.

Now, here's the “twist in the tail” ... Jesus told this parable to a crowd of Jews gathered at the Sea of Galilee. Matthew says there were so many of them, Jesus had to get into a boat in order to be heard.

We don't know how many were in the crowd that day, but there must have been a good bunch of 'em. Let's be generous and say most of them were paying attention and got the point.

The truth is, after Jesus finished teaching, most of them went home - or back to work - their lives unchanged. But a handful of those who heard him that day were touched in such a way that they would never be the same again, and they went on to become a part of the larger group of Jesus' followers, and it's through this handful of faithful witnesses that the gospel of Jesus Christ spread from Jerusalem to all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

AND THAT, **THAT**, IS THE POINT.

In spite of it all, **God comes through.**

I runga e te Ingoa o te Atua, te Matua, te Tama me te Wairua Tapu.
In the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit <AMINE>