

Matthew 13.1-8, 18-23 Generous God – generous people

Sower, Seed and Kingdom Harvest – all things come from you and of your own do we give you..

Matthew's Gospel is often regarded as the gospel for the Church – and it is the only one where we find the word "ekklesia" which refers to the church as an assembly of people, called out by God. Today we gather – virtually – as the called out followers of the Way – to worship God.

Today, we gather around Jesus, the story-teller, as he pushed away from the shore of Galilee, sat down in a boat and addressed the crowds, his voice carried over the water.

So let's step into the story of the Sower by way of an Ignatian practice called the Examen. At its most basic the Examen is a discipline of looking back and noticing where God has been in our lives and in our world. On this day of Thanksgiving and giving for our church life I invite you to think over the question: where do we notice God in the life of La Côte community – and how can we support the ongoing mission of God in us and through us? Let's see if this parable can help us.

THE SOWER –

Firstly, looking at the sower - What do we make of his farming techniques?

Not particularly Swiss! I can almost picture the Vaudois farmer shaking his head and tutting, saying "C'est pas correct!" wincing as the seed is thrown randomly on the path, on rocky ground, among thorns. Who is this Sower anyway?

Most likely in the context of Jesus' ministry thus far, the Sower refers to Jesus himself, sharing the good news of the Kingdom of God to all who will listen.. as Matthew inserts "**Let anyone with ears listen-!**" So in this Sower we encounter the reckless generosity of God who hurls the seeds of his Kingdom love far and wide across all sorts of terrain.

M. Guite in a sonnet on this story writes:

**"I feel the fall of seed a sower scatters
So equally available to all."**

The word of the Kingdom stretches far beyond our own narrow vision of where God's love can reach!

Wandering around Betty Talbot's garden recently, she reminds me of this **hopeful generous Sower** in the way she cultivates her garden. She takes the seeds from her flowers and vegetables and plants them in sorts of unexpected places, so that, for example you come across lettuces thriving in the midst of a flower bed, and tomato plants shooting up everywhere! On a personal note - God's generous Kingdom sowing has been a real challenge to me this week - when I have felt ready to give up on individuals whose rocky, parched lives seem so beyond God's embrace - YET - this story tells us - they AND WE are not.

Where have we noticed our Generous God sowing grace this last year in our community? Let's notice and give thanks to God for sowing his kingdom life generously and hopefully in us.

THE SEED

Secondly, we come to the seed which Jesus describes as the Word of the Kingdom. What is this "word" pointing to? Remember the earlier challenge in the story: **"let anyone with ears listen"**! It is not enough just to hear the stories Jesus told, the Word of the kingdom is **an encounter with God in Christ** - his teaching, his healing and forgiveness, his living Word. Today, in this season of Pentecost, we ask for the Spirit of God to help us encounter the living Word, even as we read the written words of Scripture together. I had the privilege of doing just this last week with two of our Bible study groups - who helped me understand this parable - this particular WORD of the kingdom as we discussed it together.

As we look back over this last year, if we can think before Covid!, as well as during the last few months, we may be aware of how the Word of the Kingdom has fallen on rocky ground, only managed shallow roots or been choked by the concerns of our lives. This is a story of our fragility and fear pushing Christ away from the centre of our lives, trying to stay in control **ourselves** to cope with all the demands of life.

For some, Covid has pushed us into overdrive – to keep things going and to keep our own fears at bay. For others we have been left bereft – isolated and with much less to do.. Wherever we have been on the spectrum there will have been times when we have felt our faith snatched away and choked up. At other times we have sensed the Word of the Kingdom putting down strong roots and sustaining us in these uncertain times. I wonder where you are at the moment in this story of the Kingdom Seed? Let's welcome the seed – the life-giving Word as it lands in our lives today..

Let's think now about the **HARVEST, noticing where God has been at work through grace among us and** overflowing into the world around us.

Cyrus Habib – an Iranian-American lieutenant governor of Washington state, has recently decided to opt out of politics to become a Jesuit priest. I was struck by what he said had first drawn him to God - glimpsing beauty, truth and goodness in church worship! Surely, beauty, truth and goodness are hallmarks of God's Kingdom harvest, (as Helen pointed out in her reflection yesterday). Today we give thanks for the harvest of God's goodness, beauty and truth as we have encountered them **in our community**, even in these turbulent Covid times. We give thanks – acknowledging Ephesians reminds us – that our faith is God's gift to us – so we do not boast – today – but give thanks to God.

Just this last week, we have celebrated all sorts of creative beauty in our online community activities and montages – pets, music, nature, reflections, prayer and poetry – all glimpses of the abundant harvest of God's living Word.

Over recent weeks we have heard stories of every day faith from members of our church sharing the ups and downs of life during Covid – tales of loneliness, grief and loss, of struggles to look after staff and businesses, of work on the frontline, of staying rooted in prayer even through difficulties, of striving to bring reconciliation in divided communities. The harvest is not for us to CONTROL – but God's good work in us – a harvest that sometimes grows richly in the struggle. That is why I like the bold beauty of brick red poppies, often on the edge of rocky paths and thriving precisely in churned up soils. A hopeful picture of God's harvest in unsettled Covid times..

We have been deeply blessed by our ministry team and **all** involved in our worship – volunteers who offer their gifts and faith to help us grow. A particular harvest thanksgiving goes to our youth – Johan Crocoll and James Burrows who have enabled so much online connection over these last few months.

We have also witnessed a rich harvest in care for one another and for our wider world – through daily and weekly prayer. Our community has especially kept in mind the more vulnerable. I have been bowled over, for example, by the love shown for one member of our church who ended up in hospital – unbeknown to anyone, even his family! And who has been tracked down and cared for by a few members of our church. Another church member has been suffering from memory loss and has moved into a care-home where she has not been forgotten but received cards and phone calls and visits from our church family.

Kingdom harvest of course extends beyond us into our fields of work and influence. Members of our church have stayed mindful of much poorer communities and have raised funds to support them, for example through charities such as Friends of India and Nourishing minds, and locally with food banks.

So today, we give thanks and we offer ourselves and our La Côte Church family back to God. We are thankful to God for sowing grace generously among us. We give thanks for our harvest – always aware that there is so much more to learn and embrace.

One member of the Bible study group pointed out that the Sower in the story could be each of us, entrusted to sow God's love and life generously all around us.

Giving to our church is indeed a shared responsibility to become Kingdom Sowers of God's love among us and well beyond us in the fields of life all around.

**All things come from you O Lord –
And of your own do we give you. Amen**

