

# Devotional Blog

## Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July

One of the great childhood pleasures is to have a story read to you. The reader gives not only their time and attention but also a warm comfort of a story that is often well known to the child. There is much assurance in the middle of the story when things are looking gloomy for the hero; for the child, who often knows favourite stories word perfect, knows that good will prevail and the heroine will live happily ever after.

Retelling stories is so common. Superhero films are huge box-office. Spiderman, the Incredible Hulk, the X-Men, and many others are enchanting young audiences today. Yet most of characters and tales date back to the 1950/1960's in magazines like Marvel and DC comics.

The storylines follow the well-known pattern of good triumphing over evil, even if evil seems to be winning for most of the time.

Jesus used stories to get over the main messages of his ministry. We call these stories parables, and they are often very well known. Jesus uses this story telling technique to explain the nature of the Kingdom of God, and what folk must be to become a part of it.

Now the idea of striving to be a member of God's kingdom was far from new in Jesus' day. The religious leaders such as the Pharisees worked hard to gain God's favour on judgement day, called the Day of the Lord. The Pharisees were not wrong in this ambition, but Jesus tells them the way they approached the task was misguided. Their methodology was to try to live by a mass of rules, huge lists of dos and don'ts. This, they hoped, would bring them God's favour.

Jesus explains in narrative parables what the real Kingdom of God is like. The stories use picture language and metaphor. Now, we must be careful with this, for it is easy to read an over-elaborate meaning into a parable. However, our reflection on Jesus' parables, to tease out their meaning for us is precisely what Jesus is hoping for when he used them.

If we look at that old favourite, the parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-9,18-23), we can pose many different thoughts on what the seed and the various soil conditions represent. Matthew's Gospel includes one explanation of the parable meaning (vv18-23) that many scholars think was not actually said by Jesus but was added in later by the early church. So, the parable is open to fresh interpretation.

We could see the nature of the different soils as applying to different times in our life. We all have days when our ability to take on board God's word is totally trodden down. We can be hardened by illness, bereavement, or anger and God doesn't get a look in. There are also days when our initial enthusiasm for prayer or Bible Study or a church project wanes, and our keenness dries up.

Competing demands for our time and talent can choke out progress on our faith journey. And yet, the sower constantly provides more seed for us, enabling us to find the right time to worship, to pray, to serve, to be fruitful.

It's good to note that in Jesus's parable most of the seed falls on unproductive soil. Notwithstanding this we end with an unexpectedly abundant harvest.

The message for us today is that the gift of the great harvest awaits. The Kingdom of Heaven comes in power, and our witness and discipleship which is often fragile in this world will be magnified by the generosity of God into a fruitful, extravagant, and altogether gracious yield.

Your life story as a Christian is a parable. You are called to be the Sower and throw grace and love around like there is no tomorrow, precisely because there is a tomorrow, and it belongs to God.

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