

# LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



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## FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

12<sup>th</sup> July 2026

Text: Matthew 13:1-23 (see page 3)

This chapter on parables follows on from Jesus' conflicts with the religious leaders of his time. While their teaching was dominated by appeals to oral tradition and authorities from the past, Jesus' teaching was characterised by his use of parables. Parables have been usefully described as 'short stories with double meaning' and through these Jesus, using images and metaphors that were part of people's everyday lives, invited them to think deeply about the ways of God.

In the parable today Jesus relates a simple scene of someone sowing seed. This would have been a common sight and a regular part of the life experience of his Galilean audience. As Jesus tells it, nothing extraordinary happens and yet through this imagery he invites them to reflect on their experience and see what it might say to them about where and how God is at work in their lives and how they are responding to him.

The basic metaphor here is one of growth or the lack of growth and it is a symbol of Jesus' own ministry of preaching the kingdom. Some never gave him a chance, others are enthusiastic but not prepared for the long haul, and others become derailed by the worries of the world or material concerns. Finally, those who hear the word and take it to heart bear fruit in staggering quantities, way beyond what any farmer might reasonably expect. The point is that the kingdom preached by Jesus is both a gift and a challenge. What happens to the fruitful word that is sown is up to us.

### SEAN GOAN - Let the Reader Understand

#### INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This is part of the third largest discourse of Matthew's five. At the end, you find the concluding formula: When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place. (Matthew 13:53)

- (i) You have three very distinct portions of text here, each from a different "layer" of the tradition, reflecting different concerns. The parable of the sower is found also in Mark 4:1-9 (slightly longer) and Luke 8:4-8 (quite short). The surprising increase is given differently in Matthew (100-60-30) and Mark (30-60-100).
- (ii) The intervening—and very puzzling—conversation is also found in Mark 4:10-12 and Luke 8:9-10. Matthew's version is much longer. On the face of it, the text seems absurd: why speak at all if the purpose is so that people may not understand? The context for this unusual spread is the much later Christian attempt to understand rejection of the Gospel by God's first chosen people. They reasoned that as it happened in this way, it must have been part of God's plan to extend salvation beyond the boundaries of Judaism. They found support for this in the texts from Isaiah. Matthew—always the rabbi—gives the fullest version of the text and even adds the beatitude in vv. 16-17. Here it fits the context and indeed Matthew's purpose. This means, to put it plainly, that we do not have here Jesus' own understanding of the purpose of the parables but a later generation's understanding of God's mysterious use of the "no" from the people of Israel in order to create a "yes" among the Gentiles. Hence the beatitude at the end!
- (iii) The allegorical explanation of the parable—usually assumed to reflect both a later "church" context and a flattening of the original parable—is also found in all three synoptic gospels, Mark 4:13-20 and Luke 8:11-15. Matthew's version reflects his interests and typical vocabulary. He takes up the word "hear" to introduce the explanation. He moves the idea of understanding from "outside" the parable and makes it part of the interpretation. In Mark, the seed is the "word"; in Luke, the "word of God"; in Matthew, the "word of the kingdom." Very importantly, Matthew expresses his interpretation in the singular, challenging the individual hearer to respond.

#### Thought for the day

The parable of the sower is told twice, in an original form and in a later, church interpretation. The explanation tends to dominate our reading; but it might be worthwhile allowing the original parable to "speak." It tells of small, even careless, beginnings—the sower scatters all over the place. As we see in nature, tiny seeds have an astonishing, miraculous effect. Go back over your own experience and recall something which began modestly but which in the end grew surprisingly. The reign of God is like that—the modest beginnings of Jesus' own preaching had tremendous effect.

KIEERAN O'MAHONY OSA - [www.tarsus.ie](http://www.tarsus.ie)

The parables of Jesus are a call to understand and live life just the way he understood and lived it. If we do not identify with Jesus we will hardly understand his parables.

What Jesus sows is the message of the kingdom. Matthew says so. Every parable is an invitation to pass from an old conventional world that is hardly human, to a new land full of life, just as God wants it for his children. Jesus called it the kingdom of God. If we do not work for a more human world, how will we understand his parables?

Jesus sows his message in the heart, that is, in the inner depths of the person. That's where true conversion takes place. Jesus does not discriminate against anyone. What happens is that to those who are disciples and walk in his footsteps, God grants them an understanding of the secrets of the kingdom. Those who fail to take the step of following Jesus and continue without making an option for Jesus will not understand his message, and the little they do hear, they stand to lose.

When we end up living with a closed heart, we have a problem. For what happens then is inevitable. We will have ears but we will not hear. We will have eyes, but we will not see Jesus. Our hearts will not understand anything. How do we sow the gospel in our Christian communities? What will inspire us to welcome the sower?

**JOSÉ A PAGOLA - Following in the Footsteps of Jesus.**

### **POINTERS FOR PRAYER**

1. Jesus uses parables to make people think about their own responses to his message. As you read this parable you may recognize that at different times you have been like each of the different types of soil. As you recall times when you presented fertile soil for the word of God, what helped you create that receptive atmosphere? What lessons for life do you get from that?
2. Parents with children, teachers with pupils, speakers with listeners, are all like sowers in a field where the preparation of the soil is up to another – the child, pupil or listener. They can sow the seed but cannot guarantee that it will bear fruit. At times there may be a temptation not to try any more. The challenge is to sow in hope. When have you been surprised by the harvest you have reaped?
3. "We are wasting our time here" may sometimes be the apparent wisdom in a group. Have there been times when you have gone against this apparent wisdom and seen your efforts bear fruit?

**JOHN BYRNE OSA - Intercom**

On this and the next two Sundays we have parables of Jesus for our meditation so it would be good to remember the special characteristics of this kind of teaching.

1. Parables are wisdom teaching. By reading them we get a new insight into some aspect of life, such as parenting, friendship, leadership, spiritual guidance, etc.
2. They teach by way of paradox. Things that we thought to be opposed turn out to be both true, and taken together reveal a new insight. We must always be on the lookout for a surprise in a parable - an unexpected turn of events, something being praised that we would not normally consider praiseworthy. If we follow this up, the oracle ends up challenging our values or the dominant values of our culture.
3. Parables are stories and we are invited to enter into their movement. At a certain point the story comes to a climax - the moment when we experience surprise. This moment will be different for different readers, and for us at different times in our lives.

The parable of the sower is one of Jesus' greatest, not merely for its content, but as a masterpiece of imaginative teaching. The parable of the sower is perfectly fulfilled in the *lectio divina* method. The biblical word is a seed sown in us; personal experience is the soil in which it takes root; we can identify various factors which prevent the word from 'producing crop'; once we 'hear the word and understand it' (i.e. come to wisdom) it yields a rich harvest.

**MICHEL DE VERTEUIL - Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels**

Today and in the coming Sundays we will hear the parables from Matthew 13. Parables are more of an experience than just a story with a hidden meaning, they are the great wisdom teachings of Jesus. They demand an alertness from us, speaking to our hearts through what is said, and often through what is left unsaid. Parables do not end once we are finished hearing them. They stay with us, often having us with unanswered questions that invite us to ponder and reflect on our own experiences; parables awaken our senses. Today's gospel is in three parts: the parable Jesus taught, an explanation of why Jesus taught in parables (probably added later), and an explanation of the parade of the sower (definitely added later).

*Consider your heart as the soil for a moment. How weathered is it? Is it open to seeds that may be planted? What might help to cultivate good 'soil' of the heart?*

*How do you experience the parables of Jesus? What effect have they had on your life?*

**TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT - Go Deeper**

### **Gospel Matthew 13:1-23**

Jesus left the house and sat by the lakeside, but such large crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat there. The people all stood on the beach, and he told them many things in parables.

He said, 'Imagine a sower going out to sow. As he sowed, some seeds fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up straight away, because there was no depth of earth; but as soon as the sun came up they were scorched and, not having any roots, they withered away. Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Others fell on rich soil and produced their crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Listen, anyone who has ears!'

Then the disciples went up to him and asked, 'Why do you talk to them in parables?' 'Because' he replied, 'the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are revealed to you, but they are not revealed to them. For anyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away. The reason I talk to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding. So in their case this prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled:

You will listen and listen again, but not understand,  
see and see again, but not perceive.  
For the heart of this nation has grown coarse,  
their ears are dull of hearing, and they have shut their eyes,  
for fear they should see with their eyes,  
hear with their ears,  
understand with their heart,  
and be converted  
and be healed by me.

'But happy are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear! I tell you solemnly, many prophets and holy men longed to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it.

'You, therefore, are to hear the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the evil one comes and carries off what was sown in his heart: this is the man who received the seed on the edge of the path. The one who received it on patches of rock is the man who hears the word and welcomes it at once with joy. But he has no root in him, he does not last; let some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, and he falls away at once. The one who received the seed in thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this world and the lure of riches choke the word and so he produces nothing. And the one who received the seed in rich soil is the man who hears the word and understands it; he is the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.'