

Let us pray,

Holy God come and be with us now as we break open your word. Open our eyes, ears and hearts to what you have to reveal to us. Nourish and sustain us in Jesus name. Amen.

I wanted to share with you this morning about something that has touched my life. Indeed, not just my life, but the lives of countless others, millions upon millions. It started out small, but in time, spread through the local region. Gathering momentum, it overtook this and spread through the whole continent and eventually, the entire world.

If you stand outside the Diocesan Registry Office in the late afternoon with a north westerly wind, you will know exactly to what I am referring.

I speak of course of the wonderful thing that is KFC.

Its eleven herbs and spices are one of the most highly guarded secrets in the world - their value is almost beyond comparison.

In my eleven years of working there we were always so very careful with those precious herbs and spices. Careful not to waste nor squander.

If a cook was to take those priceless herbs and spices and not just coat the chicken but also the walls, roof, drains, go outside perhaps and also throw it on the trees and carpark, one might understandably be confused by their apparent carelessness and generous use of something so valuable.

Why the liberal use of something so valuable?

This question might have lingered in the minds of a number of the well-versed agricultural crowd that Jesus encountered in today's Gospel reading.

The debate continues with regard to the agricultural practices of farmers in ancient times and in rugged hill country as Daniel Harrington notes, but even still, we might inevitably arrive at the question, what kind of farmer throws a majority amount of their seed into unfavourable conditions?

We might almost describe it as reckless as Robyn Whitaker notes in her weekly podcast<sup>1</sup>. What kind of sower is this to do something so seemingly brash? Something we'll return to in due course.

As we immerse ourselves into the third of five discourses by Jesus in Matthew, we find him beginning to speak to the large crowd. So great is the crowd that he has to get into a boat and speak from adrift.

And he begins to tell a curious parable about a sower, going out to sow his seed.

As he sows, we find seed landing on the path with birds coming to take it. Seed falling on rocky ground, where it springs but perishes in the scorching sun due to lack of depth for its roots. We find seed landing amongst thorns, which choke the seed as it grows. And finally, we find the seed which falls on good soil and brings forth grain and with it an abundant harvest.

It's also one of the fewer times when we see Jesus actually proceed to explain the parable, opening the window and casting light onto the picture that has been created.

Shedding light onto the different soils.

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<sup>1</sup> Robyn Whitaker and Fran Barber, *By the Well* Podcast via Spotify, Pentecost 6, 2 July 2020.

The first of which we encounter with the seed that is snatched away. The flat rejection of the word of the kingdom, snatched away before it can even take root.

We encounter the seed on the rocky ground, the word received which is met with enthusiasm, even joy. Which begins to spring up, but when faced with the “seemingly difficult demands of the Gospel”<sup>2</sup> and its call finds the underlying roots lacking.

We further encounter seed sown among thorns.

That whilst springing up, is choked by the surrounding other cares of the world and the lure of wealth ultimately yielding nothing.

Finally, we find the seed, the word which is sown in good soil and subsequently produces a crop a hundred, sixty or thirty-fold. Quite a remarkable increase, like planting a tree seed and finding one hundred pop up.

It’s certainly something amazing to imagine, I have no reference myself as I’ve got the opposite of green fingers, I kill most of our plants. So instead I’ll jump back to my earlier simile, it’s like cooking one piece of KFC chicken and receiving an entire bucket in return. Apologies, my last reference to that product.

But Jesus is quite specific in this sheer extravagant and quite “unusual yield.”<sup>3</sup>

In contemplating this incredible yield, it also draws out a significant detail, the wondrous potential of the seed of the kingdom.

When we let it in and embrace it, when we foster it, as we let it grow and develop deep and lasting roots, we’ll discover it has the incredible potential to explode with unbelievable growth and fruit for the Lord. Both within our lives and as church together.

Of course, this parable might also prompt us to reflect upon the soil in our own lives. Tom Wright notes that we might observe within ourselves the “stones (that) may need moving...(the) thorns (that) may need uprooting.”<sup>4</sup>

One might argue that this could be a valuable reflective practice for the church as a whole as well.

But, to return to the start, the generosity of the sower, extravagant beyond measure. Why does it matter?

Well at a foundational level, without it, all would be for nought.

It is only by the unfathomable grace and lavish generosity of the sower to sow the seed in the first place, God revealing himself to all, regardless of the condition of any soil.

The generosity of the God made incarnate in Jesus Christ. Not content to hold back but descend into the fray and become one of us. The immeasurable generosity of the Son who willingly walks to Calvary to die for us. The invaluable word of the kingdom that continues to be sown into hearts of all soils without cost today. Freely and for all.

Henri Nouwen contended that the “challenge of the gospel lies precisely in the invitation to accept a gift for which we can give nothing in return. For the gift is the very life breath of God.”

And that “once we embrace this gracious gift which we cannot earn and which cannot be repaid, only then are we freed to become gracious givers.”

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<sup>2</sup> N T Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1* (Louisville, KN: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), P166.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Harrington, *Sacra Pagina, The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), P195.

<sup>4</sup> N T Wright, *Matthew for Everyone: Part 1*, P166.

Jesus faced the different types of soil as he sought to sow within his own ministry, we need only read the preceding chapters to see this. Matthew's own community faced the same. We will face the same within our lives as we seek to proclaim that same kingdom.

The safest approach for Jesus would have been to just sow on the good soil, a good guarantee for return. The safest approach for us is to only invest in those that might be considered as having 'good soil.'

It's a transactional approach, I give, I'll almost certainly get back.

Yet our God is inherently relational, and the call of our ministry is not transactional but relational. In doing so it doesn't come with certainty and expectation, but with hope grounded in bountiful if not reckless generosity.

We are at our best when we embrace and mirror the same unbridled generosity of the sower. Both individually as disciples and collectively as church.

When we, both individually and as church learn to give with the same generosity without reciprocal expectation. Beyond what some might believe is deserved, beyond what soil we may encounter and beyond the response which is ultimately given to the word.

When we let this grow, we let it seep into the other areas of our lives. When we give with generosity of time, of relationship, of our voices and even perhaps controversially of our finances, we take after the sower and Jesus' own ministry.

It is no secret that things are looking a little different currently, well almost, Essendon are still the best team in the AFL, that much has stayed the same.

But things aren't the same. Our society is different, our culture is different. We have had to be different.

In doing perhaps if like me you might sometimes find your mind pondering what life will look like on the other side. We will recognise it. What will stay the same? What will fall away? What of those things we took for granted?

In doing so we might also ponder what we as church will look like on the other side.

I have no clue, although I'm sure people like the Bishop do.

But perhaps audacious, courageous and even borderline reckless generosity and grace might be a good place to start.

That was after all, where the sower started with us.

Let us pray,

Loving Lord,

We thank you for your overwhelming grace and generosity. We thank you sowing the seed your kingdom into our lives and calling us into relationship with you.

As you continue to sow extravagantly into each and every life, we pray it may find soil where it can grow.

Equip us to aid in your same mission and call. In every areas of our lives, help our soil to be generous and always for our sower, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.