

[Thought for the Week 24th January 2021](#)

January 24, 2021

We Sow The Seed...

(by Rev Paul Graham)

Read Luke 8:1-15



Today marks a change of direction for us that will sustain us over the next four weeks in the lead up to Lent (yes, it really isn't that long before we start our journey to Good Friday and Easter). Four weeks and four parables, each of them fairly well known but worth a revisit to see what God has to say for us today from these ancient stories.

We start with the parable of the sower, the first recorded in Luke's Gospel and one that will gladden the hearts of all *Gardener's World* viewers and allotment owners. A simple story of one person's struggles with being able to aim straight (you might suggest) and the results of his scatter-gun approach to propagation.

There are a number of ways of looking at this story.

Jesus helpfully gives the interpretation that we should be reading into this, but there are some alternatives that we might not usually consider. For instance, if this story was read from the perspective

of the local bird population, they would see great advantage in the sower's profligacy; no seed that landed on the path was wasted in their judgement.

Equally, as an advertising opportunity for the manufacturers of weedkillers, what an opening this story provides! A simple application of *Weedbegone* (*insert name of your preferred environmentally-friendly product) and see how much more productive the sower could have been! Likewise, if you were in the irrigation business, you would jump at the chance to show how your drip-system would keep even the most sensitive plants protected in the driest of environments.

We could also embellish parts, of course, in keeping up with the evolution of agricultural methods, and talk about crop rotation, fallow years, drills and different methods of sowing. For example, our parable hero might have benefited from what is known as station sowing, but that would have taken far longer.

All of which, though economically viable and probably resulting in greater returns for his efforts, would completely miss the point of the story.

There is a lengthy tradition of rewriting the parables for a modern audience ("The Good Punk Rocker" anyone?), but there is something timelessly comforting about the way that the parable of the sower is as relevant today as it was to Jesus' first audience, without the need to be updated, modernised or retold.

For those of us with green fingers (or who at least know the difference between a dibber and a riddle), this is great. We can fully enter into the story with our nameless hero, feeling the texture of the seeds in our hands, the aroma of the freshly turned soil filling our nostrils, hoping that the rain will keep away just long enough to finish the job in hand, but then praying for a downpour to save having to traipse around with the hose or watering can. We can relate to this parable far more easily than we can some of the others that Luke records (unless we happen to own sheep or have carted around wounded strangers on our donkeys to be looked after in roadside hotels). Of course, if we only possess a window box, or gardening is as palatable as root canal surgery, we might be more reluctant to immerse ourselves in such a pastoral idyll, but even the most ardent anti-Titchmarsh amongst us must recognise something of value in the story. After all, who doesn't enjoy eating the results of these labours?

But again, to spend too long on the story risks lessening the impact of the meaning. Or does it?

And here's the rub (as Bill Shakespeare would say). The story does matter because the meaning is made clear by Jesus. We don't have to mess around trying to work out what Jesus was getting at, because he tells it to us straight. We will have time to debate the finer points of biblical interpretation (exegesis and hermeneutics for the wordsmiths among you) when we tackle the less defined parables in future weeks. But this week we start off on a more basic level; Jesus tells us what he wants us to understand from the story.

And, as such, it makes the preacher's (and writer's) life a bit more difficult when Jesus does this. Usually, the preacher (or writer) is keen to discern what God is saying through the passage, and usually that focusses on the main elements of the text. Without Jesus' explanation, we might want to explore questions such as, "who is the sower?" or "what seeds did he use?" which are either answered by Jesus or not relevant to the passage or its interpretation.

But what we can see from this, as well as Jesus' explanation of the meaning behind the story, is that the story itself is important. Jesus is telling us a story that we can all relate to (well, I certainly hope so). Go to any children's section of a bookshop and you will find picture books relating to farming and growing; even in the heart of our inner cities where children may never have ever seen a cow in all its massive flesh, there are at least books that show what one looks like and where we are likely to find one.

The story that Jesus uses to make his point about God's word tells us something quite important; we also

need to make sure that we use language that people can relate to when talking about God. There's no point talking to the average person in the street about Jesus and the hope that we have in him if all we talk about is the "divine sanctification by the atoning once-for-all sacrifice of the kenotic incarnation of the triune Godhead." (rough translation: Jesus died on the cross for humanity). To be honest, I'm confused by this and a) I spent three years studying theology where this sort of language was frequently used and b) I wrote it.

However, if we spoke to people in the sort of way that Jesus did (for example, telling a rural population stories about rural life), then we might have half a chance of getting our message across.

So, to finish, here's a challenge for you.

Thinking about one of the many contexts that you are part of (i.e. home, workplace, family, retirement, etc), what story could you tell that illustrates some truth about the gospel and the Good News of Jesus Christ? (Please feel free to let me know if you come up with anything - they can always be published in a "Midweek Musing" if you're willing).

While you're mulling this over, consider the simplicity of Jesus' story; that held within the everyday action of the sower is the eternal truth of God's word and the part that we are invited to play in God's plans.

Amen.

(Photo by [Joshua Lanzarini](#) on [Unsplash](#))
