

16-07-2017 – Proper 10 – Year A
Matthew 13.8

In OLJC's day sowing seed was haphazard. Weeds (most commonly a kind of thorn) were not cleared first, but ploughed into the ground. The paths through the fields became hard like roads, and seed was scattered everywhere, on paths and edges and headlands where the underlying rock came near the surface and made the soil very thin.

To his listeners our Lord's description would have been instantly recognisable. He was illustrating his teaching with everyday events, through the language of work, weather, nature. He knew that if he spoke the dry language of the priests, the Synagogue, the Temple, the people would not hear what he had to say – what's changed? Jesus was a country lad and much of his teaching involved the use of symbols taken from nature; he spoke the people's own kind of language, and so they listened to him.

It's so easy to become distracted and to switch off when people speak in a way which doesn't relate to us, to our needs and our lives; to hear but not to listen to and absorb the heart of a message – which is what happened to many of OLJC's audience. Some heard but didn't listen. Some heard and listened but didn't understand. Some listened and heard but were too frightened of the challenge to respond. Jesus prepared the ground in the way a person of the land would do, with symbols which spoke to the experience and to the hearts of his audience. He valued each person in that crowd, and when we value someone we take the trouble to value them at their own level. If we can do that the harvest of response we reap will be worth every moment of effort.

And what of us? We frequently fail to listen to one another, let alone to OLJC! We avert our eyes, use distracted sounds like "Mmm". We interrupt, not allowing others to finish. Do we really listen, or do we just hear? How often do you ring someone up and know by the background noise that the radio or tv is claiming half

their attention? How often do we ask people how they are because of social convention rather than wanting the truth and the details of their answer?

When someone listens to us attentively, we feel valued. When someone speaks to us in our own language it feeds and enhances the person we are, making us grow in confidence and self-worth. This is how OLJC listens to us and how we need to listen to him, not only in our prayers but as he speaks to us through others. By this caring we nurture the seed of his love which develops and grows into a part of his great harvest.

But if I tempted am to sin, and outward things are strong *, what can we do? If the soil is thin, how can I compost it? By prayer, asking for enlightenment and wisdom; by a good deed, a kind word; by paying close attention to the ordinary events of our daily lives; by being fully present to each person we meet, hearing his or her spoken and unspoken needs. Our compost involves facing and not avoiding life's unpalatable aspects for fear of them troubling us; it involves rising to the challenge of being fully human in the way which OLJC made transparently clear. This is the spiritual compost given us by God. When we accept it, it nourishes the life of God within us.

God is with us in the great and in the minute events of our lives. God speaks to us in gentle stores and in language we understand. Listen to him: he is the sower, the seed, and the food for growth. Relax: the harvest will take care of itself.

And remember always the final words of last Sunday's Gospel: Jesus said, Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

- Isaac Williams, hymn writer, 1842