

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost 10th July 2005
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Readings:

- Genesis 25: 19-34
- Psalm 119: 105-112 page 355
- Romans 8: 1-11
- Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23;

When we have tried to talk to our son Gareth (who has Down Syndrome); about Church, he says that Church is just **"WORDS, WORDS, WORDS!"**

Words can sometimes overwhelm us, but we need them to communicate but so often we need to check how what we say and the words we use are received by others. — I know of one person who has been so traumatized that certain words send him into a state of anger and depression.

For him, the words are triggers recalling great pain!

Words too define us and depending on the way we use them they can help or hinder conversation.

What is God's WORD?

- the Bible
- God's spirit speaking within
- Jesus,

All three and more!

...creation...

God speaks and it happens

WORD — God activity communicates LIFE!

When Paul uses the word "flesh" he is not talking about an aspect of our humanity which is our lower nature, but in the terms of his day, flesh referred to the whole person which required restoration or redemption. (restoration with the Creator God.)

The option Paul is talking about when he contrasts living "according to the flesh" and living "according to the Spirit" is living according to our human nature.

OR

living in openness to a relationship with God via God's Spirit.

Flesh is something like the life of Adam before God's Spirit is breathed into him.

Spirit is

The human life opened up to and enlivened by the breath of God's spirit within

To speak of Flesh representing our "lower nature" suggests that there are aspects of our lives which are somehow beneath God's power to redeem and restore. Sometimes people speak of our higher nature as something which does not need redemption.

We are not a body which is out of God's reach with a Spirit which is within God's grasp! **We are complete people!**

Romans 8:11

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

God's concern is with our wholeness.

On Wednesday we had a division about how the Bible is remarkably honest about human failure and frailty and yet woven through the story God's purpose is worked.

In our Old Testament reading today we hear of the next generation revealing their human frailty.

Last week Isaac met Rebecca and they were married.

This week Esau and Jacob are born.

The twists and turns continue and Jacob manipulates a situation where he gets Esau to abandon his birthright and bequeath it to Jacob.

Yet another example that these ancient people of God who are called to participate in God's purpose are **NOT** shining examples of moral behaviour!

— However, as time goes by, Jacob and Esau are reconciled as Jacob becomes open and responsive to God. and of course openness and responsiveness to God is what Jesus is talking about when he tells the story of the sower and the receptive qualities of various soils.

We often refer to this story as the Parable of the Sower.

Some have called it the Parable of the Soils!

And once again, Jesus does not just use words — but stories and pictures which were very familiar to his audience.

The various levels of receptivity are represented by:

- **a path** which failed to allow the seed to penetrate.
- **rocky ground** with little soil preventing the roots from gaining hold.
- **ground where there were thorns** and any life was choked
- Finally there is the good soil!
- which is a receptive environment promoting growth.

and here again we need to understand the words in context! Evidently, in Jesus' day if a head of wheat (from a single grain) produced seven (average) to ten (good) grains, it was a good yield. **BUT** Jesus speaks of

**100 fold,
60 fold
30 fold**

an absolutely **AMAZING** harvest!!!

It seems from Jesus' explanation in verse 19 that the seed is the "word of the kingdom" and the soils represent not faith and unbelief, **BUT** various different levels of faith within the Church for which Matthew wrote.

- **the path** represents faith which lacks understanding and so is able to have the faith snatched away.
- **rocky ground** represents the inability of the seed to put down roots and any pressure stress or persecution cause lack of endurance!
- The soil with the thorns is receptive but there is too much competition for the seed and the thorns win out. This seems to be a faith where there is too much distraction and competition.
- The good soils of course is receptive and as well as offering the right conditions for the seed does *not* have the problems of the other soils.

If we are right that Jesus is highlighting different types of response and Matthew seems to report it that way, then we ought **NOT** see ourselves as one **OR** the other! Instead we can look at our lives and see at different times that we have been like all of these!

At times I am like the path!
lacking understanding and hardened to God's word — God's speaking to me!

At times too I am like rocky ground where God is busily sowing seeds — speaking his word— and I am inspired but it quickly goes. My intentions begin well, but then fade.

Then I am the thorny weedy ground and the cares of the world choke out my concern to listen to; to be receptive and do god's will.
I am more concerned about my possessions and ambitions!

Finally, and very occasionally, I am the good soil where God's "words of the kingdom" are able to settle and grow.

Qualities of Good Soil:

Plenty of compost, old matter rotted down — life experience

Good drainage — prayer: the ability to sift

Moisture|

right conditions, rest, nourishment, friends, the Christian community

Warmth|

Manure?

All mixed together, they allow the words of God's kingdom to grow to produce a harvest which is abundantly greater!