



# 'Worship at home' Sunday July 16<sup>th</sup> 2023



We come to worship God,  
who we find in the holy spaces  
and the ordinary places of our lives.

## Opening

O God, we come to worship in your presence with expectation, hungry for an encounter with you, eager to hear your Word. Open our eyes and ears to the presence of your Holy Spirit. May the seeds of your Word fall on fertile soil; may they take root in our hearts and lives, and bring forth an abundant harvest of good words and deeds.

We pray this in the name of Christ Jesus, our teacher and our Lord. Amen. ~ adapted from Christine Longhurst <https://re-worship.blogspot.com>



Do you enjoy listening to stories? Some families have particular stories which are passed down through the generations, or good story tellers who can entertain for hours. Over thousands of years, people have told stories not only for entertainment, but

to teach, and to preserve history and culture. Especially before the printed word, stories were important way of passing on information, and presenting new ways of seeing things.

Jesus was a master story-teller. He often taught in parables: often stories about everyday people and events, which expressed profound truths, in ways that helped people to think differently. If you count up, parables account for about one third of what is recorded of Jesus' teachings.

*"Parables are stories, the meaning of which was sufficiently in doubt so as to tease the imagination into a new understanding"*

*- C. H. Dodd*

## **Matthew 13:1-9**

*That same day Jesus left the house and went to the lakeside, where he sat down to teach. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it, while the crowd stood on the shore. He used parables to tell them many things. "Once there was a man who went out to sow grain. As he scattered the seed in the field, some of it fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some of it fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. The seeds soon*

*sprouted, because the soil wasn't deep. But when the sun came up, it burned the young plants; and because the roots had not grown deep enough, the plants soon dried up. Some of the seed fell among thorn bushes, which grew up and choked the plants. But some seeds fell in good soil, and the plants bore grain: some had one hundred grains, others sixty, and others thirty." And Jesus concluded, "Listen, then, if you have ears!"*

*Good News Bible*

**What do you hear in this story?**

**What might it be about?**

**How do you respond?**



Like many of Jesus' parables, this story invites a number of questions: What is the seed? Where is the ground? Who is the sower? It is not traditional farming practice to throw seed indiscriminately, on the paths and in the rocky places, without killing the weeds first. This farmer is probably not wealthy enough to afford to waste his precious resources.

## **Matthew 13:18-23**

*"Listen, then, and learn what the parable of the sower means. Those who hear the message about the Kingdom but do not understand it are like the seeds that fell along*

*the path. The Evil One comes and snatches away what was sown in them. The seeds that fell on rocky ground stand for those who receive the message gladly*

*as soon as they hear it. But it does not sink deep into them, and they don't last long. So when trouble or persecution comes because of the message, they give up at once. The seeds that fell among thorn bushes stand for those who hear the message; but the worries*

*about this life and the love for riches choke the message, and they don't bear fruit. And the seeds sown in the good soil stand for those who hear the message and understand it: they bear fruit, some as much as one hundred, others sixty, and others thirty."*

*Good News Bible*

**What do you hear in this story?**

**What might it be about?**

**How do you respond?**



It seems that this parable is not a lesson in farming! We are reminded of God's extravagant generosity and abundant love. Like the farmer's seed, there is more than enough of God's mercy for all, even if the ground is rocky and not ready to respond.

Sometimes we worry about who we should share the good news of God's love with... Is the 'ground' fertile? Are they ready to hear? We make judgements about where to sow our seed. Perhaps we are called to simply sow seeds of love, indiscriminately, and leave it up to God to be responsible for what then happens to that seed. God is at work in the world, in all the world, and not just the places we might expect. Telling others about God's love might just nudge them to notice what God is already doing in their life.

### ***The Generous Sower***

*When I planted seeds for the first time my mother taught me this old proverb (which has many variations):*

*One for the mouse*

*One for the crow*

*One to rot*

*And one to grow.*

*Of the seeds you plant, maybe one in four will grow, the adage said. Some versions have the wind or the rook taking away seeds as well. I like the idea of the birds and burrowing rodents sharing the abundance, the wind grasping seeds only to drop them into surprising places. I even like the realistic allowance for biological chance - some seeds folding back into earth without the quickening spark to initiate fulfillment of the life cycle.*

*The Sower is generous, profligate, even. I can't imagine wantonly throwing seed amongst rocks and thorns and pathways. Jesus means to make us laugh. What kind of sower sows with such excess, such uninhibited childish extravagance?*

*I no longer think of the thorns, the rocks, the pathways, the birds as "others" with us nice Christians as the fertile soil. I embody the infertility, the leaving to chance, the impossibly stubborn thorns, the immutable rocks, the shallow soil, the unprotected ground, the carelessly trodden pathways wide open for winged robbers and burrowing thieves.*

*But some patches of good rich soil receive the grace the Sower scatters with such playful abandon. And maybe that little bit is enough to multiply one hundred fold. I need not hoard grace - so you birds of the air, you little mice, feed your families, eat your fill. Plenty of grace for all.*

*-Suzanne Guthrie <http://www.edgeofenclosure.org>*

## **Closing**

Great Sower God, we see the abundance of your love; the seed flung far and wide to places that are bleak, barren and choked. We are in awe of your generosity.



We hear of the abundance of your hope; the seed flung to heart and mind, to peoples who were once in darkness and now see your light. We are in awe of your generosity.

We touch the hem of your abundant grace: the seed flung into our lives to heal and renew even in the midst of our brokenness. We are in awe of your generosity.

Great sower God help us to show your love, your generosity, and your good news to those we meet. Amen

*- adapted from Together in worship and praise, year A (Mediacom 2019) p162 4*