

## MESSAGE – Mutual Humility

Mutual Humility – which means a shared humility, a humility we all have in common. This is a value we all share in putting others first. And it is critical to our effectiveness in mission, and *gospel renewal* both locally and abroad.

Humility is so vital, as we both, hold to the truth of God's word but navigate the complex issues of people and whanau and in our communities...

Today's parable will help us see we're confronted by different states of heart (hard, rocky, shallow, cluttered) but there is only one state of heart that can *hear* and *receive* Gods word – a soft heart. Soft heart = humility.

We did cover this parable a few months ago because of our journey in Luke at present. However, my hope is that there is some fresh encouragement from this passage for us this morning.

READ MATTHEW 13:3-9 (for today's purposes – NLT)

<sup>2</sup> A large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat there and taught as the people stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup> He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:

"Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. <sup>4</sup> As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. <sup>5</sup> Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died. <sup>7</sup> Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. <sup>8</sup> Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! <sup>9</sup> Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."

Matthew 13 is a well-known and simple story of profound meaning. It's a story about *personal responsibility* and the *power of listening*. It begins with Jesus sitting by the sea of Galilee, a stone's throw from Peter's house in Capernaum, when a great crowd comes to him. In Mark's account (Mark 4:3) Jesus begins with the word "*listen*". Here in Matthew's account he ends the parable with, "*he who has ears, let him hear*" (Matthew 13:8). Later in Jesus' explanation of this parable (Matthew 13:18-23), Jesus again points to the significance of listening by beginning his explanation with, "Hear then the parable of the Sower; when anyone hears the word..." (Matt. 13: 18-19). This makes *listening* and *hearing* major features of what Jesus is teaching here.

The parable of the Sower has three key components – the Sower, the seed and the soil. The first two components might be out of our control, but the soil is descriptive of us. *We determine what type of soil we are.*

### **The Sower**

Interestingly, Jesus calls the person in this parable a Sower. Yet, nobody had that job description at that time. Farmers and labourers sowed seed amongst their many other tasks of farming.

But Jesus is making a point that his main task, and therefore the work he was to be known for, was sowing. That is sowing the seed of the kingdom...*let's talk about the seed,*

### **The Seed**

All the seed is the same, the quality, integrity and reliability of the seed is not in question in this parable. Jesus calls the seed, *"the word of the Kingdom"* (Matt.13:19). This seed is sown generously on all the different soils of the field. The seed and the Sower are constant; what varies is the soil types. We are described as like these different soil types.

As we read the parable, two images jump out at us:

1. *Much of the seed goes to waste.* In fact, three quarters of the seed (assuming the different soil types cover similar sized areas) goes to waste. Jesus is saying many people will not respond to the word, and if they do, they may give up and not be fruitful for the Kingdom. This is immediately reassuring and sobering.

Reassuring because it tells us not to be surprised when people ignore the word of the Kingdom, or when people have an initial burst of interest and then give up, or when they become distracted and walk away. It is also sobering because the parable reminds us that most people will not listen to the word and will not make room for the word of God to take root in their lives. It reminds us that the responsibility for listening and being attentive to the word of God is on us personally; we are responsible for the type of soil we are.

2. *There is an enormous harvest from the good soil.* Matthew describes this as 30, 60 or 100-fold. That is a huge dividend on the seed planted in the good soil. If we found investments like that, we would all want to invest in them! This is Jesus' point. When we really listen, with humility, understand, and obey the word of God, the fruit in our lives is amazing!

The quality of the seed is not in question and the Sower is constant; what varies is the soil types. We are described as like these different soil types.

## **The Soils**

Remember the sower and the seed might be out of our control, but the soil is descriptive of us. *We determine what type of soil we are.* There are 4 types of soil described that the Sower spreads the seed of the word on.

### **1. Pathway**

The soil on the pathway Jesus is talking about is hard, because people walked over it regularly, it has been compacted and a hard crust has formed. The seed cannot penetrate or take root and is easily eaten by the birds. Jesus likens this to the evil one who snatches away what has been sown in the heart of a person who has become fixated on the ways of the world. Their interest is in human understandings, current trends, what's popular and fashionable. They have been shaped by the ways of people to such an extent that the word has no chance of penetrating the crust and taking root.

Perhaps another way of looking at this soil type is to see it as representative of people who have become cynical, bitter, and hard-hearted, perhaps through a rejection of God due to prior hurts or disappointments. What this hard ground needs is to be tilled; for the hard crust on the surface to be broken open and the deeper, softer soil to be exposed. It needs to be softened. Then there's the...

### **2. Rocky ground**

This soil is given the most attention by Jesus (Matt. 13: 5 & 6). This ground is best described by what *it is not* - three times the word "*not*" appears in these two verses - "*there was not much earth*" - "*because they did not have deep earth*" - "*since they did not have any roots*"

We probably all know people like this soil. They come to faith in Jesus with excitement and exuberance, but that passes quickly, and they have soon moved on. What happened? Jesus describes these as people with shallow soil. The roots are unable to go deep and find moisture in the earth, and they are soon shrivelled in the hot sun.... might say absorbed by the cultures of the day...3rdly, there's the...

### **3. Thorny ground**

If a key element of this parable is *listening with humility*, then these people have choked their ability to listen to the word.

Invariably those people are choked, make God fit around their world, their desires their wants. They have let too many other voices take precedence and have lost focus on the distinctive word of Jesus.

The seed falling on *Thorny Ground* represents someone whose life has been overwhelmed by a range of competing priorities, most of their time is spent on things that have little kingdom benefit and little time on the things that do. Complacency and compromise have set in. Sadly, it is all too easy to be overtaken by other important issues and concerns – none of which may be bad or wrong.

But they can take over and become a distraction, and the commitment to the word of God and all he asks us to do, takes last place. C.S. Lewis said, “*If Satan can’t make you sin, he will make you busy*”. We were created to worship, but many will fall into the trap of worshipping things of the world after losing focus on Jesus.

## Soil Types

We can see that the Pathway is like hard ground, rocky ground is like shallow ground and thorny ground is like cluttered ground...

Soil Type	Problem	What the Soil Needs
Pathway	Hard	Softening
Rocky Ground	Shallow	Depth
Thorny Ground	Cluttered	Space

As you are listening today which of these soils do you sense best describes your heart?

If our hearts are like the *Pathway*, we must work on becoming *softer*. Softer to the word of God. *How can you do that?* Maybe reading the life of Jesus from the gospels for five or ten minutes a day. Perhaps simply praying that God would soften your heart to see who the person of Jesus really is.

If your heart is like the *Rocky Ground*, then what you need is *depth*. You need practices of prayer, Scripture reading, the support of someone you trust to guide you spiritually for a season. What about committing to a small group, getting involved in God’s mission work and serving in the life of the church. These practices enable growth and depth.

If your heart is like *Thorny Ground* then what you need is less clutter.

What are the things we're doing that prevent us from doing the things the Lord wants us doing? We need *space* for listening to the word of God, space in our hearts, we're responsible for making that space.

**(Reflective prayer...)**

There's one more soil...

#### **4. The good soil**

There is nothing complicated about this soil. It isn't special. But it is fertile soil, it isn't *hard, shallow or cluttered*, it is ready and receptive. The essential thing, is that the seed goes into this soil and the word was heard for what it is. This soil responds to the life-changing and life-empowering gospel of Jesus who died and was resurrected as the first fruit of the new Kingdom. This soil makes Jesus Christ, his word, his church and his mission the priority of their lives. And this soil that regularly allows seed to be sown, will always bear fruit. Much fruit.

The people described as this soil type did three things:

- They listened – really listened.
- Accepted – received and let it go deep.
- Produced fruit – they let the seed do what the seed could only do, bear fruit.

\*The application here is simple. Because we determine what type of soil we are, to listen, accept and produce fruit. *How do we do that?* Ensuring on a day-to-day basis the soil of our lives is ready, receptive and fertile. And we achieve that in prayer, in the word, in regular fellowship and being involved in God's mission.

The core message of this parable is to *listen with humility and produce humility*. As we are involved missionally with the poor, disadvantaged, and unreached of the world, we too must start with listening. This is a humbling step for us - one where we don't come with the answers, techniques, or control. But rather we come with open hearts and listening ears, knowing that God is already at work in people's lives and that each person has much to give and teach us. We aspire to follow Jesus' example by seeking *mutual humility* and cross-shaped living in service of others. Jesus describes the word as a seed, and we all know that for a seed to bring new life it must fall into the ground and break open to let life come.

This is exactly what Jesus does with his own life. When we press into the value of *mutual humility*, we are being called to die to our pride and die to our control, and that means looking at the soil of our hearts.

Ps. 1:3 *That person (whose delight is in the law of the Lord) is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.*

The Baptist movement of Aotearoa is missional. We're a part of that movement and part of the new and renewing work God is doing. Therefore, I believe God is calling us to embody this value, of *mutual humility*, in order that we might be effective in what God has before us.

To conclude I want to set before you the words of Paul that wrap up everything we've talked about today... and happens to be a key passage for our humility as it relates to mission...

Phil. 2

Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. ***Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,*** <sup>4</sup> not looking to your own interests ***but each of you to the interests of the others.***<sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: