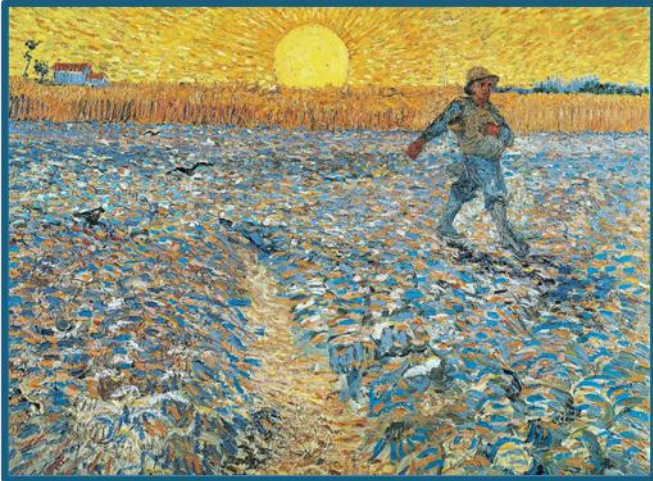


*Jesus the Storyteller*

**The Parable of the Sower**

As it is now gardening time, this parable, which discusses the difficulties of getting things to grow seemed to be a good choice for this time of year! This well-known parable is found in three of the Gospels with slight differences in each story. We will look at the version written by Mark. **Read Mark 4:1-20** (Image is the Sower at Sunset by Van Gogh)

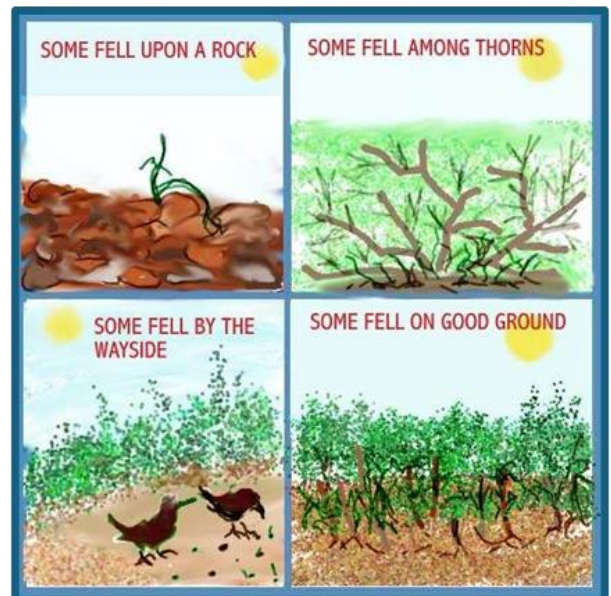


The reading contains not only the parable but also, unusually an explanation of the parable as well as some idea of what Jesus thought parables were for. There are, therefore, a few things for us to consider this month.

Jesus tells this parable from a boat and begins by saying to the crowd; ‘Listen!’ or ‘Hear!’. In Mark, these are all signs that Jesus is going to tell the crowd something

significant.

Although we often call this parable, as I have, the parable of the sower; the parable is really about the seed and the ground the seed falls upon. The sower is only mentioned so we can get the seed sown into the ground! As the seed is distributed, it is thrown somewhat haphazardly and therefore lands in both expected and unexpected places. If the seed falls in unexpected places it either does not grow at all or begins to grow and then dies off or gets eaten. But the seed that falls on good ground grows and grows well producing abundant crops. The explanation Jesus provides tells us that the seed is the word of God and the soil is the listener. We can work out for ourselves which type of soil we are!



Jesus may have told this parable for two reasons. Firstly, by the time Jesus preaches this, there is already opposition to his ministry. When Mark wrote this parable down, the early believers were also facing opposition. This parable provides some encouragement and reassurance to Jesus’ disciples that they should expect some opposition to their

ministry and that failure of the word of God to take root in their listeners was not actually their fault.

The second point Jesus may have been making is that despite appearances, when the seed does take root, the result is an abundant crop. Jesus is assuring his followers that despite appearances the Kingdom of God will take root in the world and great things will come from it.

The troublesome part of the Bible passage comes in Jesus' explanation of the purpose of parables. In verses 10-12, Jesus seems to imply that he uses parables in order that outsiders are prevented from understanding. This teaching seems contradictory to the rest of Jesus' ministry which is very inclusive of all sorts of people. Jesus does not have 'insiders' and 'outsiders.' I researched this verse in a number of books and there was no agreement or certainty about the meaning of these verses.

Despite the fact that this story is ancient and uses images which are perhaps alien to us; although if you garden the image of sowing seed may not be so unfamiliar. I think it is easy to see how this parable applies to our lives today. We live in a society in which the Gospel does not seem to be taken seriously at all. We see and meet people who will not listen to the Gospel; we encounter those who listen but do not make the Gospel a priority; we meet those who allow the pressures of the world to squash the power of the Gospel in their lives. The overriding message of the parable however is one of hope – as the seed which lands in good soil grows into abundant crops so God's Kingdom will eventually prevail – failures which occur when the God's message is not heeded will not win the day.

### **Discussion:**

1. What would you identify in your own lives as 'fruit' produced by hearing and receiving God's word? (Question and information adapted from 'The Parables' Gooder 2020)



2. Wheat does not grow for the good of itself – its purpose is to nourish others – how have you/are you nourishing others with the words you have received from God?
3. Have you ever felt like the soil that was dry and hard or rocky or a plant that grew and then died?
4. Do you think Jesus is intending to exclude people from hearing and accepting his teaching in verses 10-12? Does it worry you that there is no clear answer to this question?