

Sermon for Online Service: Pott Shrigley 19th July 2020.

Rev David Swales

Matthew 13.1–9,18–23. *Sowing God's Word*

On Wednesday I took my last 'Collective Worship' of the year at Pott Shrigley School: I told the story of Moses crossing the Red Sea. I still remember the first school worship I took, back in 1984, in Bradford. I was the new curate, and was expected to go into school and take an assembly. The only problem was that my mind was a blank: what on earth should I talk about? I had no experience of speaking to primary school children.

My vicar came to the rescue: it's simple, he said; just tell a Bible story. So that is precisely what I did, and, though I can't now remember which story I told, I do remember that the children listened, even enjoyed it; and, as children so often do, they understood the story's underlying message and meaning.

Since that first time, I have probably taken close to two thousand assemblies or acts of worship in schools, and, almost always, I have told a Bible story. Just think if the only thing I had to draw on was my own wisdom, my own bright ideas! I doubt I could have even managed two dozen; I would soon have run out of things to say. But the Bible is an inexhaustible treasure chest, there is so much in here that gives us guidance for life; it's great that our new school motto is taken from the Bible: lovely words from Ephesians chapter 4: *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

The Bible gives us more than just guidance for living, though: it reveals God Himself to us, helps us to know Him better. And most of it is in the form of wonderful stories, stories of God's interaction with humanity; and this means that anyone can understand its message – both adults and children.

Of course, there have been times when I wondered if anyone was listening – or if the story I told had meant anything to my hearers. Perhaps the children were having trouble concentrating – or I was not making a very good job of telling the story. But I usually find, when I ask the following week, that the children *have* heard the story; they have remembered it – and understood it. More exciting still is when I meet former pupils, sometimes many years later, and they tell me that they remember me going into school week by week, they remember the Bible stories, and that this has helped them in their life and their faith.

I shouldn't be surprised, though, because there is so much power and wisdom packed into these stories, so much truth which God reveals to us through them. They are a bit like seeds; seeds don't look much – if I took seeds out of this packet, you would hardly see them on your screen – but in them, too, there is so much hidden power, so much potential: the potential to be a beautiful flowering plant maybe, or a fruit bearing tree. And, as we get to know the story of God's dealings with us, it too has potential; the power to grow, in our lives, God's meaning and purpose, His hope and peace

That's why, in His Parable of the Sower, Jesus used seeds as a way of talking about God's word.

He tells of a farmer, sowing seed in order to grow crops; wheat, barley or corn. Here I have wild flower seeds; we are planning to let part of our lawn go a bit wild, and we want flowers to grow there. These seeds should help things along. First of all, I bought this tiny packet for £2. But Kim told me to stop being so stingy: we needed to scatter loads of seeds; after all, not all the seeds will grow. So she went out and bought a number of these bigger packs – plenty of seeds – and we’re going to sprinkle them all over those areas of lawn.

It was the same for our farmer; he knew that, if he was to have a good crop he should throw out seeds not in ones and twos, but in great handfuls – spreading them over all the ground. Not all would grow, for some would fall on bad ground, or get carried away by birds, but that shouldn’t stop him from throwing the seeds: he should spread them wherever he could - and then wait. Some would grow; and some wouldn’t.

Jesus says we should do the same with God’s word. We should tell the story – the Good News – of God’s love, not just to a few people, maybe those we think will listen; we should tell it to *everyone!*

You might say, of course, that it’s easy for me: I get the chance to go and share those Bible stories; in school, in church, and in other places too. That’s true. But we all have our own opportunities to tell the story of God’s love – to spread the seeds of God’s Word, if you like. So next time you have the chance, don’t stop to decide if this person will really listen, will really believe – like the good soil in the parable – tell it anyway: like me with my school worship, you never know who is hearing, who is remembering, who is believing; you never know for sure where the good soil is.