

SERMON Trinity 8 2008

"Let anyone with ears listen!" (Matthew 13:9)

Introduction

A radio presenter is interviewing a guest on his programme. He knows that ideas, theories and notions do not themselves make good radio. They take too long to explain. The listener will turn off and switch to another channel. So the presenter's heart takes a bound when the guest says, "Let me give you an example." Or better, "I'll tell you a story." Down the centuries the Church has sought the best way to communicate its message.

In the Middle Ages, when few people could read or write, the Church produced simple, community drama (Mystery Plays), to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Even today we seek new ways to communicate. In the Bible belt of America, they've invented the Gospel Gobstopper. This is a boiled sweet, a candy. You suck one for a minute, take it from your mouth and you find a quotation from the Bible has appeared. "O taste and see how gracious is the Lord," for example. They call them New Testaments.

That may not be the right way for us but we all need to seek and find the best way to communicate the faith. That often means telling a story.

We live in a world of stories. The more homely the better. At least one Church Army Captain uses a ventriloquist's doll to assist him. His name is Professor Theos and he can explain theology to any child who will listen. But at the heart of getting people to listen is often the story.

Gospel Teaching

The disciples of Jesus asked him, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He

replied, "Because hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand." He knew the value of a good story. And parables are good stories. He also knew that even the best story won't do unless it is relevant to the situation. It's often easier to remember the story than to remember why it was told. So let's look at why Jesus told the parable of the sower.

He was sitting in a boat at the time, by the side of the lake. A crowd of people had gathered to hear what he had to say. He said, "Listen!" That's always good if you're about to tell a story. Get the audience to be quiet. As he looked beyond the people he probably saw a man sowing seed in a field and that gave him his parable. It was a homely story that everyone would understand.

A sower went out to sow. A teacher went out to teach. A mother went out to show her son or daughter the way. Or a neighbour gave advice to a neighbour. This parable applies to all of these. One of the greatest problems in relationships between people is when the other person fails to do what you *know* he/him should do. You've advised he/him many times; you've given he/him clear instructions but it's like talking to a brick wall. It's like seed landing on stony ground. The first thing we learn from the parable is that not everything we say or teach brings forth fruit.

See how Jesus teases out the story. The thorns, the birds of the air, the rocky ground, the scorching sun — all mean the seed will not grow. Communicating is like that. We would love to share the Gospel with other people but we fail to get it across to them. There may be good reasons. We may be speaking the wrong language. They may not feel any need for faith. They are on rocky ground. They may feel pressure from their peers, the people around them, the birds of the air, the scorching sun.

Application

But there'll be a brighter day. Oh yes. For beside the thorns, not far from the pathway and the rocky ground, there's good soil. The rain and the sun will help the seed to germinate, grow, blossom and produce fruit. Maybe even a hundredfold. Jesus knew that beside the lake that day were some whose lives would be changed. I'll tell you a story.

A vicar came to a new parish and on the first Sunday he preached a sermon. The second Sunday came and he preached the same sermon again. On the third Sunday everyone was amazed to hear the identical sermon yet again. The churchwarden spoke to the vicar. "Do you realise," he said, "you've preached the same sermon three times?" The vicar replied, "Yes, and I'll go on preaching it until someone does something about what I'm saying!" We should never give up hope. Keep on casting the seeds.