

Text for the 5, 4 November 2018

Mark 4:1-20, taken from Who?

¹ Once, Jesus was so hemmed in by people on the shore of lake Galilee, that he had to speak to them from a boat out on the water ² He used stories to explain the Kingdom of God to people. ³ 'Imagine a farmer, walking across his land, a bag of seed around his neck. As he walks, he picks up the rhythm of sowing – swinging his hand from side to side, scattering the seed everywhere to make sure some of it takes root. ⁴ Some falls on the path beneath his feet, where greedy birds dart in and out, snatching away whatever they can. ⁵ Some falls on rocky ground, where the soil is shallow – it seems to thrive at first, ⁶ but the roots have no depth, and the sun soon kills it off. ⁷ Some falls into thorns which choke the new growth – it doesn't stand a chance. ⁸ But some seed sinks into rich, deep soil. Up it grows, strong and healthy, producing an abundant crop many times bigger than the seed with which it began. ⁹ Do you hear the message in the story?'

¹⁰ Later, on their own with Jesus, his followers asked him, 'Why do you speak in riddles?' ¹¹ 'It's a way of testing people,' he replied. 'Each story contains a message about God's Kingdom, like jam in a doughnut. Those who do no more than nibble at the outside never find it. But those who are truly hungry find an explosion of taste just when they least expect it. So, those who are just looking to be entertained simply hear the stories. Those who truly want to find God pick up on the message they tell. ¹² Sadly, the ancient prophet summed up this generation when he said

"They can't make out the truth in what they see or hear.

Spiritually blind and deaf, they don't know which way to turn for forgiveness."

¹³ 'Take the story of the farmer and the seed. That's an easy one! Can't you see? ¹⁴ The farmer is God and the seed is the good news I've come to bring. ¹⁵ The fate of the seed says something about the different responses people make to my message. Some people have allowed their hearts to harden, and the message never penetrates the surface. God's Enemy finds it easy to dart in and snatch it away. ¹⁶ Some people make an instant but shallow response. At first, they seem to thrive, ¹⁷ but there's no depth to their commitment or understanding, and when the heat's on, they fade away. ¹⁸ Some people hear the good news, ¹⁹ but their lives are overgrown with distractions – worry, greed and the like which choke the message, giving it no chance to ripen and mature into full faith. ²⁰ And then there are those whose hearts are fully ready and receptive. The good news goes deep and grows, strong and healthy, producing an abundant crop of faith and new life.'