

Quinquagesima Sunday 2017

“And Jesus said, ‘Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee.’”

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Last week, we heard the parable of the sower. Jesus said, “A sower went out to sow his seed”. On the surface there does not appear to be anything extraordinary about that. There he goes with a large pouch full of seed over his shoulder, hanging waist-high. And he broadcasts the precious seed in all directions, without any discrimination. The breeze carries some of the seed onto a nearby path; other seed falls on a section of ground that is very rocky; and still a couple of handfuls of seed fall amongst some small tender thorns. It is the Spring time and everything is just beginning to be renewed, so the thorns are small and tender. Finally, you know it – some of the seed was broadcast onto good soil.

But let’s stop there for a minute with that visual of the sower walking through the fresh, turned-up soil, damp and dark as it is, throwing out the seed. Let’s stay there for a minute. The seed is truly precious. Life is packed into that little hard thing. It carries unbelievable potential, waiting to be unlocked by the sunshine and the rain! So what we have now is a very hopeful picture. Life is being distributed. Life that will transform the landscape is being freely broadcast and carried on the wind. It lands where it lands, presenting an opportunity, and an eternal hope.

As we learned last week, the sower is the Lord God Almighty; and the seed is His life-giving Word. And the soil – the four types of soil – represent the hearts of people. John Keble a priest in 19<sup>th</sup> century Church of England, out that what this parable reminds us of, first and foremost, is God’s action of redemption. Keble urged his listeners to consider how quickly a piece of ground grows up in weeds and alders if left untended. Even a well-kept lawn will go to the dogs if it is left for a month – especially in June. And, he said, that happens because of Adam and Eve’s sin. After they disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit they were warned not to eat, the Lord told Adam, “Cursed is the ground because of you, in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3.17-19)

But instead of leaving us to become what we deserve – instead of allowing us to grow wild, without any hope or purpose – God sent His Son to sow the seed of everlasting life in, our hearts. Jesus came to offer us order – holy order – and His Peace which passes all understanding. When we, like a piece of ground grown up in alders, deserved to be bull-dozed, God chose to offer us new life. ...A sower went out to sow his seed.

That is what today’s Epistle and Gospel are all about – the mercy and charity of God. As St. Paul told the Corinthian Church: “Charity suffers long and is kind...Charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Charity never fails.” Mercifully, patiently, humbly and with shame and humiliation, the One Who is all-Charity came to sow His seed among us, offering us new life – His life. It is a gift we cannot earn, as we learned two Sundays ago. We may work all our lives for the Lord; or we may be the last one to join Him. It doesn’t matter because the gift is His to give, not ours to earn. The gift is freely given to us through Jesus the Christ Whose precious Blood was shed when He stretched out His arms upon the Cross as our Substitute at Calvary.

We hear about the Cross in today's Gospel. "Behold," Jesus said "we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge Him and put Him to death; and the third day He shall rise again." There it is, the gift of Christ's Sacrifice. We do not *deserve* it... It is God's gift. So, in the sower, we see the LORD Jesus, Who offers the world new life through His Death and Resurrection. .

Even today, His work of sowing continues by the invisible operation of His Spirit in the Church. The Lord uses people in all walks of life to broadcast the seed of His eternal Word. For example, He used Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden Powell, and his wife, Olave, and his sister, Agnes, to broadcast His seed to the millions of boys and girls through, in Canada – and in New Brunswick –to sow His seed. Think for a second of someone who was instrumental in your life – someone who taught you about God the Holy Trinity, and about the Lord Jesus and His Cross and Resurrection. And now think of how He wants to work through you. A sower went out to sow His seed, and in doing so, as the Epistle reminds us, He used charity – sacrificial love – and so may we.

At the end of today's Gospel, we meet a blind man who was sitting by the path near the city of Jericho. He heard a crowd coming towards him and asked someone what was going on. The person told him that Jesus was in town and was passing by. The blind man immediately began to holler, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" And, he kept it up even when people told him to be quiet. "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!"

The Lord Jesus heard the man, and came over to him. "What do you want me to do for you?" He asked. "Lord," the man said "that I might receive my sight." And Jesus said, "Receive your sight, your faith has saved you". In this encounter we can see ourselves. There we are as human beings – blind without the light of Christ. Spiritually blind because of our fallen human nature, and because of our sins. We need the new life of Christ. We need the seed of His holy, life-giving Word. We need His Spirit to renew us and bring us the forgiveness and healing and hope of Christ.

"Faith, Hope and Love abide," wrote St. Paul "but the greatest of these is Love". It is the sacrificial Love of God in Christ Jesus that has afforded us this new life. It is that Love Incarnate in Jesus that defeated the power of sin for us at the Cross. And He calls us now to receive the precious seed of His Charity that we may be born again.

On Wednesday – Ash Wednesday – the season of Lent begins. It is the season of preparation for Easter. In it we seek to be renewed spiritually – to have our hearts purged from selfish, worldly things so that we might live more and more in the new life of Christ. Lent calls us to a season of repentance and faith – to spiritual house-cleaning – to prepare the soil of our souls that we may receive the eternal Word.

Let us embrace this opportunity so that we may be filled with the new life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...