**Sunday 12 July – Sixth Sunday after Trinity**

**Sermon by Rev'd Steven Rothwell, Clergy Development Officer Ely Diocese**

*As it is café church from St. Luke's, there is no sermon from there for this week. The Diocesan sermon is based on a different set of readings but can be listened to at Weekly Sermons from the Diocese of Chelmsford. Instead the sermon from the Diocese of Ely is shown below.*

**Parable of the Sower**

I enjoyed watching the TV series, *Detectorists*. It's about a small band of men and women who search for buried treasure using metal detectors. They insist that they are not metal detectors, they are detectorists; their tools are metal detectors. One of the main characters drives a TR7 and plays the mandolin sitting down because he's never learnt to hold it whilst standing up. It's a comedy drama that mixes a love of history with other more universal preoccupations of romance, disappointment and group dynamics. Some of the episodes start with the main characters walking in a field somewhere in Essex chatting about watching *University Challenge* on TV the night before. The camera then drops below the surface revealing the clay that lies beneath their footsteps until it eventually settles on some of the Anglo-Saxon treasures buried deep in the earth, the sort of thing that they are so keen to find. Their hope is that one day they will find these treasures but until they do, they must be patient.

There are plenty of things in our life we try to do quickly. We could try and get rich quick, lose weight fast, we could buy a car in a matter of minutes, sell our house, even get married, or end a relationship, quit our jobs and apply for a different one, sign up for a course….all these things we can do relatively quickly and they are all part of our culture that tells us we don't need to wait.

The parable of the sower is a story about waiting. It focusses on what is worth waiting for. It's about letting time take its course. It's about discernment. Martin Luther preached a sermon on this parable; he said that the disciples of Christ are the ones who lay hold of and keep the Word in a good and honest heart, and bring forth fruit with patience, those who hear the Word and steadfastly retain it, meditate upon it and act in harmony with it. A good description of discernment.

Discernment is that process which is fundamental to discipleship and faithfulness. It is the opposite to a quick fix. It is about listening; it is about letting time unfold and it is about allowing God to work. Put that way, discernment doesn't sound like a very pro-active way of behaving. It is counter cultural. 'If you need or want something, go out and get it' would appear to be the message that we are sold. But I believe that listening is a pro-active exercise, that acknowledging the importance of time is also a creative gift that we can nurture in ourselves, and that being mindful to how and where God works is at the heart of our Christian commitment. Another way to describe that is prayer.

One way of understanding the parable is to view the Sower as God. The seed that is sown is Jesus (or ‘the word‘). Note what that means: that in the parable, Jesus (‘the Word‘) has already been sown everywhere in the world, with or without earthly co-operation. But haven’t Christians in general terms acted as if the Word was nowhere until they arrived bringing it with them? Haven’t Christians conducted missions on the assumption that they were bringing Jesus with them? Just like in the parable, we see and hear but still don’t catch on.

According to this parable, it isn‘t Christians who bring the Gospel to the world, it is God who has sown the word, and so perhaps like the Detectorists, it is the role of Christians and others, to unearth what the word is doing.

The whole parable is full of imagery about growing. About a plant bearing fruit. A plant that fails to bear fruit is sad. We too are sad if we bear no fruit, if we fail to grow, if we fail to recognise where God‘s seed is sown. But the failure to grow and bear fruit is not a punishment; it’s simply that we are missing an opportunity. Jesus is suggesting that he is the seed that is already sown, but here are many things that might get in the way of the seed growing. We might be one of those things, with our misunderstanding of what God wants.

The seed is sown everywhere but even where it has grown it might be savagely chopped down, a metaphor for those abuses of humanity that traumatize our world, like genocide, holocaust and abuse. Sometimes we don't recognise where the seed is sown because of how happy, wealthy or healthy people are; the seed is sown in places of poverty and famine, but the fruits are only enjoyed by the rich and powerful. The seed is sown

where there is sorrow and despair, and it will take time for the seed to bear fruit. Jesus says that the seed that grows immediately endures only for a while, but when trouble arises it soon withers.

The way Jesus uses the parable is to reveal to us the way of the kingdom. Part of that kingdom is the mystery of how it operates. Jesus chooses seed to represent the word himself, not a thunderclap, or a lightning bolt - but a tiny seed. The true coming of the word of God may not look like very much, and it will be mysterious and misunderstood when it finally starts to do its work. And when it starts to grow, the seed disappears. It dies, leaving us with the fruit.

Knowing that the seed is already sown means we are not in the business of trying to change people. The seed of God's love is already sown – we don't have to be planting it. Our work as a church, is nurturing that seed. Tending it and caring for it. That means tending to and caring each other. Ultimately that is what everything we do is about – every meeting, every pastoral visit, every time of prayer, every social occasion – is about caring for and tending to the seed.

The seed has been sown among us; here in this place, in this village; in each of us. And we are the fruit-bearers. We are the ones responsible for allowing the fruit to grow ripe and juicy, or we are the ones responsible for not allowing the seed to flourish. Can we be people who want to find where the seed is sown, no matter how deep it is buried? And when we find it, to let it grow. Let anyone with ears listen – that is the first step in tending the seed.