

**Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2021**  
**The First Sunday of Creationtide**

**Collect**

Almighty God,  
give us reverence for all creation  
and respect for every person,  
that we may mirror your likeness  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

**2 Corinthians 9:6-12**

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, 'He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever.'

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

**Mark 4:1-9**

Again Jesus began to teach beside the lake. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the lake and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the lake on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.' And he said, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!'

## Sermon

Ragwort. I wonder what you think of ragwort. Yes, you did hear me correctly. Although it may not be the question that you expected at this time on a Sunday morning. I really do wonder whether you have an opinion about ragwort.

Let me explain. Recently I caught an edition of Farming Today this week on Radio 4. I had put the radio on to listen to the news, but was a little early, so found myself thrown into a debate about the merits or otherwise of ragwort. It seems that during the week a representative of a horse association had been on Farming Today to talk about how to go about getting rid of ragwort in a field. You will probably know that ragwort is highly toxic to horses, and since ragwort can be rather rampant, he was being asked to offer advice.

While it was only information that he was providing, the response was immediate and robust. Why, asked a number of listeners, were people being told how to get rid of ragwort when it is such a wonderful plant for the environment. If I heard correctly, there are apparently some 60 species of moth that feed on ragwort, not to mention countless other insects. It is an important contributor to our ecosystem. And thus an academic and expert in conservation was brought into extol the virtues of ragwort. And, at the time that I was listening to the weekend programme, that interview had in turn led to a further backlash, as people explained just how toxic ragwort is, not only to horses, but also to cows, and the slow, painful death that they suffer as a result. And, the icing on the cake, it's not even a native plant.

It may not surprise you to know that I was somewhat taken aback by the strength of opinion being expressed about ragwort. Indeed that probably tells you something about my own urban roots. However, as a person who had hitherto had no opinion at all about ragwort, what I noticed as I listened was that it really is a question of perspective. From the perspective of horse and cattle owners, ragwort is a deadly pest. From the perspective of conservationists, it is part of a healthy ecosystem. Perhaps on this particular issue we can all be winners. Clearly livestock fields need to be cleared of ragwort, but it can be allowed to grow elsewhere. Nevertheless, our perspective really can change our understanding of a situation.

You are probably quite familiar with this morning's gospel reading, the parable of the sower. As you have read and listened to it over the years – and perhaps heard a range of sermons about it – I wonder whether you have been able to see it from a range of perspectives. Perhaps there have been times when you have found yourself hearing the parable as an indictment on those who value the wrong things. Perhaps as you have listened to ambitious colleagues talking about their latest acquisitions, your perspective has been to see that in their lives the seed has fallen among the thorns and become choked.

Or there may be times when you have felt that the parable was a comment on your own life. Perhaps you have found yourself pulled in different directions, or simply exhausted and wrung out, and have been able to identify your life with the seed falling on the path, or being eaten up by the birds. At other times, when you have felt more spiritually alive, your perspective may have been that of the good soil.

This morning I want us to focus on the sower. That is the perspective that I want us to hold onto. In many ways it's hard to do, because the sower is barely mentioned. All we hear is that he went out to

sow. And yet, as we hear about the various different places that the seed has fallen, we recognise that the sower keeps on sowing. Not only that, but he seems to do so indiscriminately. By taking the perspective of the sower, we discover as much from what *isn't* said, as from what *is* said. No matter where the seed falls; no matter what ends up happening to it; the sower continues to sow.

I wonder if a focus on the sower gives us a perspective on God. Reminds us something about the nature of God. Specifically reminds us that abundance is in God's nature.

And if we take that perspective – if we allow ourselves to believe that we worship a God of abundance – I wonder whether that might change what we do; how we live. Because the crucial thing about different perspectives is that they influence what we do. We behave differently depending on the way we understand and perceive any given situation.

So, if we explore this parable from the perspective of the sower, how might it change our behaviour?

First, it might awaken us to the generosity of God. If God keeps on giving, perhaps that is our calling, too. If we believe in what we are saying and doing, perhaps we just need to keep on saying and doing it, even if we get a mixed response. Perhaps we need to hold on to our faith in God, rather than expecting to be rewarded.

Second, if the sower shows us that abundance is in God's nature, it might change our perspective on the world. There can be times when life seems to be dominated by competition. If someone else wins, I have to lose. We see a world of finite resources and our response is a scramble to ensure that we have enough ourselves. But there are so many things that matter that are not finite. Love – perhaps the most precious gift of all – can be available in abundance if we allow it to be. And, as environmentalists have been telling us for decades, and we are finally beginning to really hear, the earth can produce abundantly if we will only take care of it properly.

And that links to my third point. This parable tells us about God's abundance. About God's generosity. And it also tells us that our response matters. The seed yields differently according to where it falls. If ever there was a time that we need to hear this message, it is now. We live on a beautiful planet; God *has* provided; and we need to be the very best stewards that we can be.

There are aspects of our lifestyles – individually and collectively – that have put the planet under threat. Even this year, experts are fairly convinced that both the extreme temperatures in Canada, and the flooding in Europe are consequences of our failures to take proper care of Creation. It can feel like an enormous task, but the message of the parable is that what each one of us does matters. How we respond will look different for each of us. Perhaps your starting point will be to find out more about the actions you can take to make a difference.

So, let's remind ourselves of God's perspective. Of God's generosity and abundance. And ask ourselves how we are being called to respond.

Amen.