

Homily for Sunday 12th July
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Have you ever had the experience of someone turning up at just the right moment in your life, exactly when you needed them, but completely unexpectedly? Maybe you have been that person yourself for someone else....

The parable of the sower is very familiar too us all, and usually we think of the sower being God and Jesus being the sowers in our lives, and that's quite right; but there's another way to think about this passage which you maybe hadn't considered.

Many years ago, when I lived in London, there was a ring any the door one snowy February Saturday morning. When I answered it, I found a young West Indian woman standing on my doorstep in great distress. She was holding a new-born baby and was wearing very thin clothing and flip flop sandals.

I invited her in and she told me her story. The baby was the child of one of our neighbours, who had cut off all contact with her about a month before she had the baby.

She had had to go into hospital for a caesarian and she had been unable to contact him. This was in the days pre-mobile phones; so she'd walked over the hill from the other side of Streatham (some 4 miles) with her baby, now 10 days old, in the snow, to see whether he'd be at home. He wasn't, so she decided to knock on my door (why my door? I didn't know her) to ask whether I'd seen him.

I hadn't seen him, but I took her contact details so I could tell her if I did manage to speak to him.

I asked whether she had any support around her, and she told me she occasionally went to the church where, coincidentally, I had been baptised as a baby! I asked whether it would be OK if I got in touch with her vicar and she said yes, I could.

Next day, I told my parish priest about this encounter and we went and looked up the contact details for staff at that church. Along with the vicar's name there were details of a woman who had the initials SPA after her name.

I enquired what they meant, and Fr Douglas said "Oh She's a Southwark Pastoral Auxiliary. That's what you should be, my dear!"

I thought nothing of his suggestion but, to cut a long story short, the SPA was able to help and I was eventually invited to the baby's baptism.

But my Parish Priest's words hadn't entirely gone away. They had stuck at the back of my head and, many months later, I did decide to look at the possibility of becoming a Pastoral Auxiliary.....and this was the first step of the journey which eventually took me to ordination as a Distinctive Deacon, nearly 23 years ago.

The reason I'm telling you all this is that that lady seeded my life., and so did my parish priest. She wouldn't have known it, but that encounter sowed a seed in me which eventually grew and took shape.

By the same token, I have had other encounters where I have been privileged to be the sower. I have lost count of the times when someone has said, "You remember when you said X? That was exactly what I needed to hear?"

Sometimes I will remember saying whatever it was, but other times, I have no recollection of the event. at all. Sometimes I will be pretty sure I hadn't actually said what the other person had thought I'd said; but it clearly wasn't so much the actual words I used, but the message they conveyed had spoken into the needs of that person.

You may have had similar experiences. I'd say that all our lives we are sowing seeds; and often we don't know we're doing it. Sowing is just our way of being, the way we engage with the world and relate to other people.

But we can only sow seeds that were first sown and cultivated in us. Jesus sows in us Love, Peace, Hope, Joy, Forgiveness, Mercy, compassion, wholeness, reconciliation.....the list goes on.

Those are the seeds our Lord sows in us, seeds that we are to cultivate and allow to grow in us, so that we can seed the world.

There are times in our lives when we have no time, no energy and nothing seems to be growing; seeds of opportunity have been missed, for whatever reason...and there are times when life can feel pretty rocky, with fear or anger getting in our way....or we can feel constricted, strangled by past hurts and regrets, which need to be weeded out.

Then there are times when our life is flourishing, flowering; and the seeds in us can grow and multiply.

If we look back to our `gospel reading we will notice that the condition of the soil doesn't stop the sower. God doesn't only seed on good soil; and it can be at times when we feel we are at our lowest ebb that God comes to make something new grow in us.

God sows not because of who or what the ground is, or who or what we are but because it is in God's nature...and this presents a challenge to us because, as Christians we are also called to be as generous - to sow here and there, and everywhere, without regard to where the seed might land, or the quality of the ground on which it falls.

Where are with whom do we sow? The way our culture is that we want to make good use of our time and investment. The parable of the sower teaches us that we should sow, not because of an expected harvest, but because of who it is we are following and the consequences of this for our discipleship.

Finally, let me leave you with some questions to ponder. What has God sown in your life? Are you tending and cultivating it? Where and what are you sowing? What does the land of your life need in order that you can sow with generosity?

"Listen anyone who has ears", Jesus says. What do you hear in today's gospel that will enable you to live out your life as the person God has created you to be, and to sow seeds of the Kingdom?

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