

Sunday 16A 20.7.26

Last week we heard the parable of the sower – seeds going all over the place but only a few bearing much fruit. Today we hear several parables and again an explanation given to the disciples who seem unable to fully understand what Jesus is going on about and I wonder whether the parables Jesus uses are like the seeds which are deliberately obtuse so that the understanding will only come to those who are prepared to allow themselves to change, to be open to new possibilities, to start from a position of helplessness and not-knowing which allows for grace, for God, for the Spirit to teach us, like the

soil with good porosity and a wide range of interconnected pore-sizes.

And this made me think of living in community and how difficult it is because we come at it with such a wide range of “pore-sizes ? “ that sometimes it seems impossible to grow anything at all and, as organic farming cannot save us on its own, so other more structured traditions have also to be used but the starting point of organic farming remains, the wider vision that is of not only changing the soil but of changing the person using the soil as well or, in the words of Bruce C Ball once again:

to me the best thing about organic farming is not the principles or the regulations but the mindset of the organic farmers and producers, which is driven by their connection to the land and to the people...

Their priority is caring for the soil, for the animals, for the people and for the environment, rather than crop productivity.....

(The Landscape Below p99)

We are talking about ‘love’ of course and its complicated nature, its desire to see growth in others and yet not without constraints, not without regulation, not without someone finally calling the shots. Dom Gregory was a great one here for leaving us to largely to find out what to do for ourselves, for allowing the weeds and the wheat to grow up both within each of us and as we would like to see in others rather than ourselves, so that judgement would eventually come in the fact of some staying and others leaving. Or, as Dom Gregory

would say, *I give you plenty of rope to hang yourselves*. This often made it very difficult to know how to navigate the many different and sometimes difficult personalities who came to test their vocation and the vocation of the rest of us . In theory this is community as the seed- ground of holiness. In practice it could be pretty chaotic – we wanted only the wheat please and not the weeds both within and without. Which of course is the point. We were so often reduced to a sense of helplessness and frustration that the only place to go was to prayer and to chapel, to that structure of regular praise together which formed the skeleton of the day and kept us together both individually and as community. The disciples are being taught something of this in Jesus's use of parables, this navigating life without clarity and judgment. Indeed the explanation tagged on the end of today's parables, as last week, seems something of an intrusion into this process of becoming helpless in order to understand, a desire indeed for a final reckoning which puts everyone in their proper place, a desire which readily becomes some form of self justification and revenge, dualism by the backdoor – I'm good, you're bad and God will give you your just desserts- the weeping and grinding of teeth which are mine now but will be yours later – so there! No, we go back to the process and our own lack of judgement, the pain of not being right all the time, of not knowing what is the best thing to do whether for yourself or others, of that enduring in uncertainty, the process of living here and now which is the only place love becomes possible. If you want a rule of life you will find it in your neighbour – but take heart, the parable of the mustard seed and of the leaven tell us that the beginnings must needs be small and we can leave its productivity to God.

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