



Sermon Notes

The Parable of the Generous Sower
Matthew 13.1-9; 18-23



The parables of the scriptures seem to me to be like a wonderful piece of art. You don't look at a celebrated painting to get the exact interpretation, the art does not have a singular interpretation, not because it lacks meaning but rather it has so much meaning. There is too much to grasp, that is why we return to our favourite pieces of art, again and again. The artwork draws you in and in some way transforms you.

So it should be with the familiar parables of the scriptures.

We hope that today as we think about the often hidden and forgotten world of seafaring that this familiar parable will help us to be drawn into a conversation, hopefully one that transforms, not just our understanding and thinking, but our way of living. We want not just to give you information but to stir your hearts and minds to want to find out more, to want to care more, to be generous beyond the norm. As the sower was in our story. Or at least that could be one interpretation.

First let's have a rethink of the story and then let's try to make some connections to Sea Sunday. You will hopefully begin to make lots of your own along the way.

A re-telling of the story. From a different perspective.

The teacher is here, the teacher is here, the word had quickly spread around our community that morning, he was down by the lake, talking with his followers. We'd known he was in the village of course, rumours of his family coming to collect him had spread quickly the night before, rumours of how he'd snubbed them, snubbed even his mother in front of a crowd, refusing to go with her...



Seafarers often spend many months away from their families and homes."

He'd challenged the Pharisees and teachers too, refusing their claim that he was possessed by demons. And then he had turned his eyes on the crowd, eyes full of compassion. Someone told me that it was as if he'd looked right into every eye, every soul in the place and called them his family: "Whoever does God's will" he'd proclaimed "is my brother and sister and mother."

So you'll understand why we couldn't resist going to find him, we left the crops to tend for themselves that morning and went looking for him, it was then that we heard the whispers, and began to make our way to the lake. Many others had heard too it seems for there was a huge crowd pressing forward when we got there. So big in fact that we were pushing Jesus and his followers off the shore and into the water. They got into a boat and pushed out from the shore, and then to our relief they stopped and dropped an anchor, he turned and faced us and began to tell an extraordinary tale.



“ Often we come across seafarers who have been forced into working in horrendous conditions. Bonded to ships or fishing vessels to work long hours for little reward.”

He told of a sower scattering seed over a field, but what kind of sower was this, seed fell generously on the path, amongst the weeds and even among stones. He sowed upon the good soil of course, but seemingly with no care when it came to the less fruitful places. Now we know that you cannot prevent seed from falling on these difficult areas, but most of us take care not to waste too much, we know where we are in the field, we make sure that the fruitful, well tilled soil gets special care...



“ Seafarers can find themselves in difficult areas, some abandoned without pay surviving for months at the anchorage, relying on the support of the Mission to Seafarers to bring basic supplies and encouragement.”

Yet here was this sower in his story scattering seed and knowing that some would come to nothing. I pondered this, he wasn't talking about seed of course, nor was he talking about soil. His words, his wisdom, his grace were the seeds, and we were the field, that much I knew. Then I saw it in my mind's eye, a picture of this sower with a sack so full of good seed that he had more than enough to spare, he did not need to be careful in his sowing, he knew that his seed would bear fruit, he knew that some of the good land would produce one hundred fold crops, and so he sowed with outrageous generosity...

It was not that he did not care for the seed, he knew that each grain held within it one-hundred-fold potential, and he knew the hearts before him, knew that some would not, and others could not receive him...



“ At the Mission to seafarers we believe that all that we do demonstrates the goodness of God, we trust Him to use the loving service that we offer to transform hearts.”

And I pondered this, for I knew that this sower would reap a fine harvest and then set out the next season to sow again, that he would sow again with the same outrageous generosity, and as I pondered I realised something new, that unlike my seed, his seed, his word had the power to transform even the hard soil where it fell. That year after year that falling seed could bring about a change, if the soil were willing, if the hearer responded.

He sowed not for the crop - though he would celebrate that, no he sowed because he loved, loved with an outrageous love, and gave with outrageous generosity, outrageous grace, and he tended each plant with gentleness and care, and none was disregarded.

We all rely on seafarers

We're there to support seafarers when they need us most. Men and women who work at sea can be affected by any number of problems: money worries, mental health issues and loneliness, as well as piracy, shipwreck and abandonment. These issues can be made worse by a lack of facilities, with email only available to less than 25% of seafarers on board ships.

And it's not just practical support the Mission offers. We know that seafarers need emotional and sometimes spiritual support too.

That's why we have a large network of chaplains who come on board ships, giving seafarers a listening ear and prayer, if needed. They can also connect seafarers to other organisations or speak on their behalf.

The Mission is open night and day, 365 days a year. We work in 200 ports across 50 countries, caring for seafarers of all ranks, nationalities and beliefs.

Throughout a long and distinguished history, The Mission to Seafarers has grown to become one of the largest port-based welfare operators in the world.

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