

**Date:** 10<sup>th</sup> July 2011

**Sermon:** Rev Dr André Groenewald

**Reading:** Matthew 13:1-23

### **Background to the reading**

In our reading this morning Jesus gets in the boat on the Lake of Galilee so that he could address the crowds of people who came to him and his disciples. It would have been quite easy for them to hear Jesus' words in the quiet peaceful environment.

Jesus told parables which he later interpreted for the people to understand the message He wanted to convey to them. In this case He would tell them 7 parables. Parables are AND I QUOTE "a comparison drawn from nature or daily life and designed to clarify some spiritual truth, on the assumption that what is valid in one sphere is valid also in the other."

In our reading Jesus says there was a farmer who sowed his seed. Seed was often (though not always) sown before the ground was ploughed; it thus commonly befell any of the fates reported here. A farmer could either cast the seed by hand, as probably here, or let it trickle from holes in a sack carried by an animal. The "path" or "road" is one of the many footpaths through the field. Much of the land in Palestine has only a thin layer of soil over rock. The sower would not be aware that he wasted seed on this soil because he had not ploughed it first to see what lay beneath the ground.

Other seed fell among "thorns". The Greek word *Akanthas* can also mean "a prickly plant", "thorn bush" "a thistle" or "weed". The author could refer to a weed common in corn-fields or to the common thistle, of which there were many varieties in Palestine. In this case again because the soil was not ploughed the roots of this weed could not be seen which meant that it grew with the seed only to choke it out.

But some seed did fall on good soil to produce a good crop. Thirtyfold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold are tremendously good harvests from Galilean soil. The Jordan Valley normally yielded between ten- and a hundredfold, so a hundredfold need not be a miraculous harvest. But for much of Palestine, the average yield was tenfold (meaning that 10 seeds were harvested for every seed sown), and all the figures Jesus reports here are very good yields.

From verses 10 to 23 Jesus then explains what He wanted to say with the parable. In those days the Rabbis would tell parables and then explain their meaning to their students which in this case was his disciples. It seems as if the crowd vanished and Jesus is just talking to his disciples. Jesus quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10 to make the point that the people heard the message from God through the prophet Isaiah but they did not respond to it. They did not repent and carried on living their lives as if nothing had happened. Now Jesus is making the point that the same is still happening to every believer who listens but shows no reaction! In double irony Jesus

also makes the point that they “see” but are blind to the consequences of their sight! Yes the believers must in the end be able to understand with their hearts. The heart was regarded as the seat of all affection. Jesus said that anyone who truly believes and understand the message of salvation will have a loving heart.

These believers, who truly see, listen and hear what faith is all about, understand and therefore inherit the kingdom of heaven. Faith is about living the consequences of Jesus’ redemption every moment of everyday. It is about not only listening to the words of Jesus but hearing the consequences thereof.

Amen

## **Sermon**

The text verse for the sermon is verse <sup>23</sup> *But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.*”

A theologian by the name of Karl Barth said that the Bible *per se* is not the Word of God. It only becomes God’s Words in the lives of believers once it leads to action, when God’s Spirit starts to change the way you speak and act. I guess this is exactly the point Jesus was trying to make. No one can say that they are his followers, but do not live as His followers. No one can truly hear his Words but not heed to live it concretely in everyday life. The Kingdom of heavens belongs to those who hear and listen and really take action, and to those who see and understand the consequences of having lives of faith.

Some believers can indeed hear the Word of God but not really “listen” to it, meaning that it goes into one ear just to leave the other ear with no deliberate change of heart. It is like an ordinary everyday story where a woman would tell her husband that she had just returned from town and that he must be careful on the road since it was slippery after the snowfall. He of course would “hear” her but not listen at all.

It then could mean that he would indeed forget what she said and find himself in a very challenging situation once his car starts sliding from the road! Can you imagine what he would say to her after the event? Yes, it is rather obvious: Why did you not warn me?

I think the same is true of our faith. We hear God’s word telling us what to do, what to ignore, what to avoid, how to love, how to trust and how to keep our faith alive, but sometimes only hear it with not listening at all, without any action or change of heart. If we are serious about our faith we will be committed to follow Jesus wherever He wants us to go despite the sacrifices.

But we need to keep our faith alive. And in order to do so we need to be open to God’s Holy Spirit working in our hearts and minds. We need to trust God more and be His hands and feet in all the places we find ourselves daily. We need to read from His Word the Bible – not when we are tired or weary but when we are alert to remember what He expects us to do.

A good way to remember is to tell His story of salvation over and over again like the hymn we sang earlier. We need to tell the story to everyone around us. We need to tell it to ourselves when we are scared or anxious. We need to tell it to others that find themselves in difficult situations. We need to tell it over and over to remind ourselves of the new kingdom of heaven that is our ultimate destiny. Yes we need to tell the old, old story of Jesus and His glory, and of Jesus and His love wherever we go.

Jesus promised everyone that has faith the eternal kingdom. When this life passes, those of faith will inherit a kingdom where they will be with God forever and ever. And all we need to do to inherit this kingdom is to listen and follow the instructions Jesus left us. All we need is to see the kingdom of God in all its glory, whenever His word becomes the LIGHT in our dark roads, whenever we are lost and find His loving hand guiding us to safety.

So why would we not listen to Jesus' words?

Amen.