Lectio Divina – 15th Sunday of the Year A – 16th July 2023

Matthew’s Gospel (in brief)

* Composed between 80-90 CE
* Author is anonymous, but named as ‘Matthew the tax collector’ by later tradition.
* Written in scholarly ‘synagogue’ Greek.
* Incorporates almost the entire Gospel of Mark, plus material from Q and material unique to Matthew.
* Structured around 5 major discourses (each ends with the phrase: “When Jesus had finished….”:
  1. Prologue – chapters 1- 4 Genealogy, Nativity & Infancy
  2. 1st: 5-7 Sermon on the Mount
  3. 2nd: 10 Missionary Discourse
  4. **3rd: 13 Parable Discourse**
  5. 4th: 18 Community Discourse
  6. 5th: 23-25 Apocalyptic Judgement Discourses
* May be a parallel for the 5 books of the Pentateuch - Jesus the new Moses.
* Jesus first words are ‘to fulfil all righteousness’.
* A handbook for Church leaders to assist them in teaching and preaching, worship, mission and polemic.
* 2 broad categories: discourse & narrative.
* The only Gospel to explicitly mention the ‘Church’ – Matthew is theologian of the church.
* Initially addressed to a Jewish-Christian audience – only late in the Gospel is there openness to Gentiles.
* Names Jesus as ‘Messiah’ at the very beginning and throughout the Gospel.

Matthew 13:1-9 (short version) - things to notice

* This Sunday’s Gospel begins the middle section of Matthew’s Gospel. The focus of for the next four Sundays is about unfolding the mystery of God’s Kingdom:
  1. Revelation of the Kingdom to the simple
  2. **Parable about the Sower [questions about Jesus’ use of parables/explanation of the parable]**
  3. Parable about the Sower of good seed, [parables of the mustard seed & the yeast; good seed parable explained]
  4. Parables about the Treasure in the Field, the Fine Pearl, the Fishing (Drag) Net
* The parable in this week’s Gospel is the first of 7 parables about the Kingdom. The others will be told over the next 2 Sundays.
* Jesus sits (typical posture of a rabbi) by the lake but the crowd grows so much that he has to get into a boat, a very unusual thing, but it demonstrates that the crowd’s desire to hear Jesus was very great.
* ‘He taught them in parables’ – simple allegorical stories with familiar, every day elements, used to demonstrate a spiritual or moral lesson.
* Since this parable is about a sower we can assume a rural audience of workers familiar with the scattering technique of sowing seed.
* Keep in mind that much of Palestine is rocky land and the soil quite thin.
* The seed falls on 4 kinds of earth:

1. the path or road – seed lies on the surface and is quickly eaten up by the birds
2. rocky soil – the top soil is thin so the seed sprouts too soon, can’t sink deep roots to find water, so it is scorched by the sun and withers away
3. among thorns – the soil is deep but already populated by thorns (a weed) strong enough to choke the new sprouts
4. rich soil – soil has sufficient depth and is free enough to allow the seed to thrive and produce its crop, though not in even measure (some 100 fold, some 60, some 30)

* ‘Listen anyone who has ears’ – a invitation to consider the implications of the parable
* The seed may well be the Word of God. Immediately before this part of the Gospel, Jesus says, “Whoever does the will (listens to and does the word) of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”
* The parable would then be about the Word of God (seed), sown widely and received very differently by human beings.
* It could also be the Kingdom of God, based on the other parables in this section. It, too, is sown widely by received very differently.
* The contrast in the parable is between the seed which falls on the road, the rocky soil and among thorns and produces nothing, and the seed which falls into the rich soil and produces a crop in varying measure.
* Parable begins with the *sower* (God, Jesus, disciple) but soon shifts to the *receiver* (road, rocky soil, thorns, rich soil). So the parable is not so much about the sower as about the receiver.
* The various ‘soils’ of the parable are analogous to the human heart: some are like hard roads which nothing penetrates, some like rocky soil with no depth and no water (love?), some are like thorns – all the space is already taken by evil thoughts and deeds, some are like rich soil where the Word takes root in the heart and produces a rich harvest.

The Liturgical Context

The Sunday Gospels Sundays 14-17: The Mystery of God’s Kingdom

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|  |  | First Reading | Second Reading | Gospel |
| 14th Sunday | Revelation to the Simple | Zechariah 9:9-10 | Romans 8:9, 11-13 | Matthew 11:25-30 |
| **15th Sunday** | **Parable Sermon 1** | **Isaiah 55:10-11** | **Romans 8:18-23** | **Matthew 13:1-23** |
| 16th Sunday | Parable Sermon 2 | Wisdom 12:13, 16-19 | Romans 8:26-27 | Matthew 13:24-43 |
| 17th Sunday | Parable Sermon 3 | 1 Kings 3:5, 7-12 | Romans 8:28-30 | Matthew 13:44-52 |

Liturgical Setting for this Sunday

First read is a short passage from Isaiah comparing the word of God to the snow and rain which come down from heaven, water the earth, make it yield seed for the sower and bread for the eating. This word from God’s mouth does not return to God empty, rather it carries out God’s will and ‘succeeds in all it was sent to do.’

Reflection

The section of St Matthew’s Gospel from which we are now reading concerns the Kingdom of God. Jesus uses this expression frequently in his teaching. The Kingdom is not heaven; it is the life and heart of God. We live in the Kingdom when we live according to the mind and heart of God.

The Kingdom, or reign of God, breaks into human reality when human beings live, breathe and act out of the life of God; when the heart of God becomes ours; when we allow God to speak and act in and through us.

This section about the Kingdom of God is the centrepiece of St Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew uses seven parables and explanations to unfold Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom.

Last week’s Gospel offered reassurance to those overburdened by religious law and often unable to fulfil it that they were not forsaken by God. Jesus says he is the one who will reveal what God is really like through gentleness and humility and by providing rest (not more burdens) for their souls.

This week we begin the series of parables about the Kingdom with the parable of the Sower. The Sower sows, the seed falls, sometimes the sower’s work succeeds, sometimes it does not. The different soils represent different human responses to hearing the word of God. Not everyone receives the message or responds well to the invitation. The parable teaches us that God will try anything to get a harvest. The sign of success is the fruit-bearing of the recipients. That’s when God’s word sown in our hearts becomes our word, too. Those who do respond to the invitation to life in the Kingdom yield the harvest of goodness and Godliness.