

## Homily for 12<sup>th</sup> July

**Texts:** Isaiah 55: 10-13, Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23

Talk to anyone who has a garden be it pocket handkerchief size or an extensive acre or two and you will quickly find that gardening has helped consume a great deal of time during the months since the global pandemic struck and I think everyone would be able to boast that their garden looks better than ever before because of all such careful attention. In my case I've almost, but not quite, won this year's battle against the ground elder while recognising that the war itself may never be won given the nature of this pernicious weed.

And of course, what has really counted is introducing new plants once the gardening centres re-opened and sowing seeds in blissful anticipation of a stunning show of summer annuals or delectably flavoured home grown produce. Now I happened to have saved some nasturtium seeds last autumn but sadly none of them sprouted and it was obvious that somewhere along the line I had failed to observe the correct drying out and storing process and it was while reflecting on this that it occurred to me that we too might be in danger of sowing seeds that for whatever reason were infertile or well past their sell by date.

One of the outcomes of the Pandemic and having locked churches has been that we have had to be both inventive and imaginative and taken a whole new approach to just how we worship. Some churches have embraced Zoom and have held 'live' services while others have relied on utilising U tube or websites which meant that worship could take place at any time of day or even night come to that. And all the feedback and the statistics have shown convincingly that this new variety of seed has shown amazing and, let's be honest, totally unexpected growth. It is so rewarding to discover that people who have not previously shown the least inclination to come through a church door are now showing, if not an full blown interest, a definite curiosity in this completely new way of being church.

And going back to the garden analogy I know that if my Mother, who loved her garden, came to mine now she probably wouldn't know half the plants and shrubs and even some of the vegetables and salad varieties might be quite unfamiliar and those she did recognise would be most probably larger or more varied in colour compared to the ones she grew. Rocket for her was something you set fire to on Bonfire night not something that appeared on your plate with a peppery taste. Varieties are continually being improved, and we are being introduced to new strains and indeed new plants which of course make the whole business of gardening so fascinating and such a challenge.

But the question has to be are we in the church happy to go on sowing the same old tried and tested seeds or do we recognise that we need to be introducing new ones which can capture the attention of those not accustomed to church services and who may prefer a screen to a book, a visual stimulus to a spoken one? Now I'm not for one moment suggesting we just throw all caution to the winds and dispense with the tried, trusted and indeed much loved but we might begin to seriously consider what new varieties might be established based on the trial period of lock down. I do think we need to be open to such a possibility and indeed recognize that whatever our own preferences we may be called upon to help with some of this new sowing using our God given gifts and specifically those who can offer IT skills. Over the coming months I'm sure that incumbents and PCCs will have a lot of serious study of the seed packets on offer to decide which ones might flourish in their parish patch.

But alongside all these considerations it is supremely important to recognize that there is one seed and that is the seed of love which all of us are called upon to scatter liberally wherever we go. That seed is the seed that lies at the very heart of the growth of the gospel and of our Christian faith. It is akin to say an acorn from which the mightiest of oaks can grow. And like all seeds it can be improved upon and new strains introduced for us to sow. Over the past few weeks we have heard a lot about the Black Lives Matter movement and the shame that has been expressed at this country's and individuals' involvement in the slave trade. Not much love there when people of a different colour were regarded as commodities to be traded and exploited just as one might sell tea or cotton. Now we have moved a long way from such mindsets but not far enough and that is where we must look for new strains of the seed of love which embrace and can grow in the hearts of all God's people.

So too during this pandemic we have frequently been told of the benefits to this planet brought about by lock down but if these benefits are to continue then all of us need to grow strains of seed that really will prosper and flourish and help against in the battle against global warming. Maybe the seeds we have so far been sowing are merely token; the equivalent of lip service to an idea rather than a genuine desire to make a difference to the future well-being of the planet and the generations to come.

Just two examples of how all of us need to be aware that we may well need to improve the seeds that we are called upon to sow in Christ's name and of course if we take only a moment to reflect there will be many other examples we can think of where new strains of the seed are required. What is so important for us as individuals is that we keep on scattering those seeds aware that as happens in our own gardens not all will bear fruit but that is not our concern; it's

the sowing in hope that must continue. Many of Jesus' words fell on very deaf ears but that never stopped Him from continually pouring out an abundance of that seed of love for all God's children. And He was always looking for new ways of doing this; ways that would attract people's attention and always seem fresh, vibrant and contemporary, not stale, boring and lifeless. And if we doubt this for one moment just remember His words about putting new wine into old bottles.

The world cries out for the growth of love, the growth of peace, the growth of justice and it for us both within our institutions and individually to find ways of doing this. Take the best of the old and develop and improve it so that as it blossoms and grows people will be struck by its originality, its freshness and its intrinsic beauty in expressing God's love for all His Creation and thus be drawn to it and all the blessings it offers.