

## **“Some seeds fell on good soil” – Matthew 13 v8**

37 years ago, I was invited to lead a service on the island of Gigha. I hadn't preached before or taken a full service, but the minister who phoned me on the Friday evening was in a panic, for he had nobody to lead worship on Gigha on Sunday, and he heard that I was delivering some messages to our youth fellowship. I myself was only a Christian of a few years.

But by the end of the call, I agreed to do it, and so I immediately went to work on preparing a sermon. I decided to preach on the Parable of the Sower - because it had four ready-made points, speaking about the four different types of ground, and so off I went, crossed in the ferry, and led the service. They invited me back again, so I must have done something right; that was a major first step in my calling to the ministry. So, anytime I hear this parable, I have fond memories of my first outing as a very naïve preacher.

Jesus said in his parable, *“Some seeds fell on good soil”* and I want us to focus this morning on the good soil.

What makes for good soil?

Of course, Jesus is not speaking about physical soil; he is speaking about the human heart and the human is the soil in this story.

He addresses four different types of soil in which the seed falls, Hard ground, shallow ground, rocky ground and good ground. What he is telling his hearers, is that not everyone will receive the message, in fact many will reject it.

We learn from the parable that good soil is found in the hearts of those who hear the message, understand it, let it take root, persevere through difficult times, and good soil are the hearts of the people who are aware of all the challenges in life that try to steal or choke the plants and they manage to navigate this.

Let us turn from the soil to the seed.

What is the seed?

The seed is the good news, which is succinctly described in John 3 v16, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him, will never perish but have eternal life”. Martin Luther once wrote that this one verse is the Bible in miniature.

What does it mean to believe in Jesus?

It means more than an academic response to the historical Christ. To believe in Jesus, is to follow Jesus, to imitate his life, to walk in his footsteps. To put into practice his two great commandments, to love God with all our heart, soul and mind and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

To believe in Jesus is to understand the significance of the Cross, and what it cost Jesus to die our death on a cross and to rise to eternal life.

To believe in Jesus is to step out in faith and to make a commitment to him.

Can you imagine a tightrope stretched over a quarter of a mile and spanning the breadth of Niagara Falls? The thundering sound of the pounding water drowning out all other sounds as you watch a man step onto the rope and walk across!

This stunning feat made Charles Blondin famous in the summer of 1859. He walked 160 feet above the falls several times back and forth between Canada and the United States, as huge crowds on both sides looked on with shock and awe. Once he crossed in a sack, once on stilts, another time on a bicycle, and once he even carried a stove and cooked an omelette!

On July 15, Blondin walked backward across the tightrope to Canada and returned pushing a wheelbarrow.

The Blondin story is told that it was after pushing a wheelbarrow across while blindfolded that Blondin asked for some audience participation. The crowds had watched and "Oooooohed" and "Aaaaahed!" He had proven that he could do it; of that, there was no doubt. But now he was asking for a volunteer to get into the wheelbarrow and take a ride across the falls with him!

It is said that he asked his audience, "Do you believe I can carry a person across in this wheelbarrow?" Of course the crowd shouted that *yes, they believed!*

It was then that Blondin posed the question - "Who will get in the wheelbarrow?"

Of course...none did.

The story of Charles Blondin paints a real life picture of what faith actually is. The crowd had watched his daring feats. They said they believed, but their actions proved they truly didn't.

It's one thing for us to say we believe in God. It's true faith though when we believe God and put our faith and trust in His Son, Jesus Christ.

The good soil are people who have heard the message and made it a life choice of following Jesus.

“Some seeds fell on good soil” said Jesus.

I want to tell you a story this morning about a man who heard the message, who acted upon it, and from this one seed many young and older lives were influenced and changed.

Back in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a man born in the North of Scotland; he moved to Glasgow, and came along to hear an American preacher called Dwight L Moody.

DL Moody was a great evangelist; he was born a poor lad, but one day someone explained to him the good news, when he was 17; it was a Sunday School teacher, this turned Moody's life around, and he was inspired by the knowledge that God loved him, and God was going to use him in a mighty way. Jesus was now his Lord and Saviour.

From being a poor cobbler, he became one of the greatest evangelists the world has ever known.

Everywhere Moody went thousands turned up to listen to him. Remember this is the 1870s. When he came to Scotland, he preached in cities and towns to audiences in their thousands, he visited Campbeltown, thousands came from all over to hear DL Moody preach in Kintyre Park. He was a sensation. This was a time of revival for the Church.

Jesus said, “Some seeds fell on good soil”.

That young Scotsman, that I have mentioned was moved by the Gospel message; Moody's message challenged him, and gave him a sense of vocation; he literally jumped into Moody's wheelbarrow. God was leading this Scotsman into himself creating a great outreach and Moody's message was the call to do it now. Some seed fell on good soil the day that Moody preached and William A. Smith was the man whose heart Moody touched.

He was already involved in his Sunday School work. But he was dismayed by the behaviour of the young boys who attended Sunday School, and he saw that the majority were sent by their parents. But he had a passion to see those young boys come to believe in Jesus.

The answer that came to William Smith was discipline and *esprit de corps* – a French phrase, which means a feeling of pride and mutual loyalty shared by the members of a group.

Here are two pillars forming in the mind of William A. Smith founder of the Boys' Brigade here in Glasgow.

His biographer states, “He realised that in order to gain the *esprit de corps* which, when rightly guided and controlled, brings out, develops and stimulates unselfishness and the instinct of self-sacrifice that is so strong in youth, the individuals must be banded together in some association in which they have common interests, with some distinctive title or badge or uniform to mark it as their own. Thus came into being the great idea that was destined to revolutionise the methods of what is now called “work amongst boys”...on a grand scale and to open the eyes of the nation to the importance of boyhood, and to effect a revolution in Sunday School methods. Smith's ultimate goal was that these boys would be transformed, gain manliness, and they may be led to the service of their Master.”

The birth of the Boys' Brigade started in Glasgow on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1883 with a crew of 3 officers and 28 boys, Smith being the captain.

It was towards the close of 1884 that William Smith began to see that the vision of a great organisation for boys springing up from his grain of mustard seed was no empty dream.

And so the constitution was drawn up and he clearly set its object at the beginning, “The object of the Brigade shall be the advancement of Christ's Kingdom among boys, and the promotion of habits of Reverence, Discipline, Self-respect, and all that tends towards a Christian Manliness.”

Its emblem was an anchor and its motto *Sure and Stedfast* and a text, from the Bible “Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth”. And suddenly the Gospel seed that landed in the good soil of William Smith's heart had taken root and the flood gates opened up and companies were being formed and enquiries from 20 towns in England and Scotland. The first camp was in Tighnabruaich on 16<sup>th</sup> of July of 1886 – 137 years ago to the very day, almost to the minute!

Some seeds fell on good soil and those seeds took root and sprouted.

Just four years after it was formed, in 1887, there were 124 companies, 385 officers, 6116 boys; the BB had spread to the USA and New Zealand.

Remember that this was the age before technology and instant communication. How the Spirit of God moved was truly amazing!

Yes, the ground was fertile and the hunger was immense.

In 1888, Smith wrote, about the BB, "Christ is the ideal man; Christ was the ideal boy; and if men and boys are not won for Christ, there is surely something wrong in the way in which we present him to them...Our boys are full of earnest desire to be brave, true men, and if we want to make them brave, true Christian men, we must direct this desire in the right channel, and show them that in the service of Christ they will find the truest, bravest life that a man can live. We laid the foundation of the BB on this idea, and determined to win the boys for Christ by presenting to them a view of Christianity to which we know their natures will most readily respond...The Brigade makes a point of acknowledging God in everything, of putting Christ at the head of everything, and tries to do it in such a way that a boy will feel that the religious element in the work is a pleasure and not a bore....We try to make him feel that there is no part of his life, that is beyond the range of God's love, and everything he does should be done in God's sight..."

Some seeds fell in good soil and William Smith created an environment where the seed could fall into the hearts and minds of those young boys.

The companies kept opening and the Boys' Brigade kept growing. In 1933, HRH Prince George was at a parade where 32,500 officers and boys presented themselves.

Yes, it was a time of a great harvest and all because of a Gospel seed that was planted in the heart of William Smith; Smith shared the seed and others received his message, and caught his vision and so the work spread. Cadder Church also caught the vision over 50 years ago, and as we know Bill Carmichael was the first captain leading the company forward.

I suppose my message today is simply to encourage us that when the seed of the Gospel falls into someone's life, you never know how God can use and bless that life.

Are we praying for God's seed to fall into the lives of this present generation? When DL Moody came to the UK to preach, thousands of Christians were meeting to pray for his visit. God honours our prayers.

Jesus does remind us also that it won't be easy, in Luke's Gospel he speaks of the seed that was fruitful having to persevere.

As followers of Jesus, we are also called to be sowers of the Good News. One of the marks of mission is to proclaim the Good News. How will people hear if there are no messengers to share the Good News.

How best can we share the message and scatter the seed? That's a challenge for the Christian Church today.

The majority of us here today have been walking the Christian life for many years; you have met many challenges, you have met obstacles and yet you have persevered, you have run a good race and you are fighting the battle.

Today, I encourage you to keep on going, even when things are tough, the battle is raging, the foes are many. Keep on believing in Jesus, keep on trusting in Jesus, keep on looking to Jesus, and he will give you the strength to persevere and to keep on going.

Keep on praying that God will raise up people like DL Moody with a real passion for sharing the Gospel. That He will raise up people like William Smith with a real passion to see lives transformed.

*Some seeds fell on good soil*, said Jesus, be thankful to God if the ground in your heart is good soil, for if it is, it will reap a harvest of plenty.

Amen and thanks be to God