

So what have we got here? A garden. A little garden.

And just like in the parable we have our path with the birds; the rockery with the stony ground; here are the thorns; and here is the good fertile earth ready for seeds.

Now if I were a gardener seeking to do a wholesale renovation of the land so that I will only be growing plants - and plants that yield fruit - well, before doing anything else I would prepare the garden. I'd cut back the weeds and the thorns, I'd clear away the rocks, I'd churn up the path and scare away the birds.

But what the sower does in the parable is cast the seed everywhere.

Now, I'm no gardener but that doesn't seem a very sensible way to do gardening to me. It seems like a waste of seed. It seems foolish. What is this sower playing at?

Another way of looking at it might be: look how generous and abundant this gardener is! Look how extravagant the sower is with her seed. How marvellous for this gardener to be so liberal in her scattering of the seed. The seeds are broadly cast everywhere.

Now, let's play with the parable and imagine that the gardener is God, that the seed is love, that the garden is the world. See how much love there is?! Even in these disaster places of thorns and rocks and birds - where there is seemingly no hope, there are glimpses of love. Love exists even for a little while.

God doesn't take the garden as it could be or should be. God deals with garden as it is and goes and scatters seed there anyway. Because the most important thing for the sower is that there are seeds in her garden. The most important thing for God is that there is love in the world.

So: the sower takes the garden as it is. Not as it ought to be.

Therefore: God takes the world as it is. Not as it ought to be.

Now let's keep playing with the parable. Let's keep God as the sower for now, but let's change up the garden. What might we get?

God takes the church as it is. Not as it ought to be.

Well, the Church of England has just had its General Synod which is certainly not perfect! And different church groups are often falling out and disagreeing with one another. But, God still showers grace over us all.

Let's keep playing. What if the garden is us? You and me. Each individual. Well, then:

God takes us as we are. Not as we ought to be.

We are not perfect beings. That spot is reserved for Christ Himself. But God does not wait for us to be perfect before deciding to do something with us. God just showers us with love. God broadly casts love throughout our lives.

Fertile Soil: Sometimes that love takes root and grows strong.

Rocks: Sometimes that love makes us feel good for a time, or about a particular part of ourselves but it doesn't last.

Birds: Sometimes the love is driven out by what some call The Enemy - and I'll leave you to interpret that for yourselves.

Thorns: Sometimes the love gets choked out by the world's voice telling us we're not worthy of that love.

But as a garden - as children of God - we should be training ourselves to note where is the love of God growing in our life and where is it struggling to grow? In what ways do I not show love to others? How can I better cultivate myself to show mercy and kindness to those I encounter? Where are the thorns, the birds, the rocks that stop me from fully flourishing, from being whole?

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But now God isn't the only one who can be cast as the sower in the parable. Let's keep playing.

What if the garden is the world? or Witney!

Let us keep the seed as love, but recast the gardener for us as the church.

We are sowers, broadly casting the kingdom of God into the lives of all those around us. We don't try to fix the person just as God doesn't try to fix the garden first. We just give them love.

And let that love transform them into who God is calling them to be.

We just keep on broadly casting that love.

Broadly cast.

Broadcast.

Joanna used that phrase "broadcast: for the sower in our Team Bible Study. And it got me thinking that right now we are literally broadcasting the love of Christ! Wherever we are in the world, we have access to our what the church is doing. The love of Christ is being broadcast whenever we Zoom, or listen to a sermon or Thought for the Day on YouTube, or call up a friend on the phone just to see how they are.

Two things are happening, I think:

1. It is sowing seeds of love for others.
2. It is cultivating ourselves for the love of Christ to grow deeper within us.

My mum said to me as I talked her through my thinking: "when flowers grow, they also produce more seeds, which then go on and are spread to those other parts of the field."

Jesus talks about the yield - thirty, sixty, hundred times as many seeds because of one seed that took root. And even if we look at this garden and imagine it to be lockdown, then we can't stop. We need to keep on gardening, keep on sowing seeds of love, mercy and kindness. And in a moment we will be hearing about some of the growth that has been happening in lockdown across the benefice.

It is by the extravagant sowing of God's love that we will see transformation not only in our lives but in the lives of those around you. Through mercy and kindness, we will see joy and peace, the whole earth bursting into song - and as Isaiah said, instead of the thorns there will be a cypress tree.

We shall see love - abundant love!