

Reading: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

We have just celebrated Matariki. Matariki is traditionally the time when we get our gardens ready for the new life of spring. We dig them deeply to be ready for the new life of the new year. The Gospel today is all about the soil of our souls and what we need to do to get them ready for the fruits of a life in God.

The point of the story, and of today's Gospel, is that we need to work with God to bring about the Kingdom of God.

The context for our gospel reading is the foreshore of the Sea of Galilee. An inland lake, the Sea of Galilee was a mainstay of the local economy and a circle of small towns stood around it. This day Jesus is teaching on the beach. But the sheer numbers of people wanting to hear him force him onto a boat. It's not hard to imagine the people fanning out around the bay with Jesus a few metres off in the boat.

Jesus teaches the people using a parable. Parable means comparison. One thing is put alongside another to see how they match. But Jesus takes it, as he does with everything, to a new art form. In his hands it becomes a riddle, a proverb, a story with meaning, as well as a this is like that comparison.

A parable normally is something we interpret. "Oh, that means that..." we say. But Jesus' parables have a way of interpreting us.

It seems simple enough: a sower scatters seed onto four soil types.

One type was hard ground, a path, and birds eat the seed. The second type is a rocky patch, the seeds grow and then die off without the depth of soil needed. Some seed falls among thorns that get choked out as they grow, and finally some seeds fell in good, deep, rich, fertile soil. This soil brings forth grain, and the crop is multiplied 30, 60, even 100-fold.

This parable is not so much a Lincoln lecture in soil types, rather it begs the question, what soil type are we?

Am I the type that when the good news of the Gospel reaches me, I'm too distracted to let it grow in my life?

How is it that I can cultivate the seed of the gospel in my life and be that deep rich soil Jesus is talking about.

Recently we had a baptism at St Luke's. At the end of each baptism, we make this promise. *"As the community of faith, we rejoice in this baptism and will share with the child what we*

*ourselves have received; a delight in prayer, a love for the word of God, a desire to follow the way of Christ, and food for the journey.*" I must have said that hundreds of times. And it's a really good summary of what it takes to be the good soil.

A delight in prayer. Are we delighted in prayer on a daily basis? We might say I'm too busy to delight in prayer. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, when he was Archbishop of South Africa, was at a press conference. It was the most difficult stage in the nation's history, and he was at the forefront of the campaign for the dismantling of Apartheid. All the world's media were there: CNN, BBC, ABC - all the letters of the alphabet. "I'm sorry," he said, "I have another appointment." "What!" they cried, "could be more important than talking to the world's media.?" "It's my prayer time," he said and off he went. If Tutu wasn't too busy to pray, how is it that we are? The church has a wonderful app called Tuia which can guide you in your prayer, and many find help from Lectio 365. If this is an area you would like to develop, I would love to help you find a way that you can pray daily.

A love for the Word of God. This is another ingredient to becoming fertile soil. Don't try and read the Bible like a book: from beginning to end. Bible means library. The Bible is a library of different books. Of all sorts of genres, poetry, law, history, letters. We especially honour the Gospel by standing because this contains the words of Jesus. The Tuia app has the daily Bible readings set down, and this will guide you through. To get the context of a passage I recommend the Bible Project which is available on YouTube and has little cartoons and very good scholarship.

A desire to follow the way of Christ. As Christians our daily prayer must be to do what Jesus would have us do. Like Jesus prayed in the garden we echo his prayer "not my will but yours God." For many Christians this is a very scary prayer because we have an image of a God who wants the worst for us. My experience is the reverse, the deeper I pray not my will but yours the more God brings me into Joy. A joy and a peace like no other. God only wants the very best for us.

Finally, food for the journey. Our food for the journey is the bread and wine of the Eucharist. We become what we eat the dietitians tell us. As we receive communion on a weekly basis, we become the body of Christ in the world. It nourishes our souls. We don't come as perfect people, rather we come as forgiven sinners in need of God's grace.

Taken together, our moving in daily prayer and Bible reading, seeking Christ's direction in our lives and food for the journey, creates in us the fertile deep, rich soil ready for the seed of God to take root and flourish.

And what fruits can we expect, well the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.