

S1 *“All good gifts around us are sent from heav’n above*

Then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord, for all his love.”

I’m sure you recognise these lines from the well-known harvest hymn: 'We plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land'. The hymn was written over two hundred years ago before farmers used seed drills and combine harvesters to harvest their crops. Farming has come a long way since this hymn was written, when the seed – or at least some of it – **S2** was sown by hand after the field had been prepared with a horse-drawn plough. **S3** (much as we see in this picture). When it came to harvest time, **S4** many people would be employed to gather in the crops. Harvesting is very different today. Now just one man and his machine **S5** do the work of many. But what is described in the next line of the hymn hasn't changed: 'But it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand'. Once the seed is sown, farmers today still have to rely on **S6** the sun, the rain and the nutrients in the soil to work their magic.

The parable we have just heard read gives us a vivid picture of the farmer sowing his seed. The parable is so packed full of teaching that it is recorded in three of the gospels. By using the image of the sower sowing some of the seed in fertile ground and the resulting abundance, Jesus’ words would have immediately resonated with his listeners whose lives depended on a good harvest. **S7** And though we may not always realise it when so much food is readily available to us, our lives also depend on a good harvest. During this time when many people have lost their jobs, it has been difficult for them to buy food for themselves and their family, and they have been forced to turn for help to their local food bank. That’s why today we have brought a small harvest of food items **S8** to be delivered to our local food bank.

It’s clear that Jesus loved to use picture language that his disciples could relate to in order to demonstrate what the Kingdom of God is like. **S9** The growth of a seed into grain ripe for harvest is one of many examples of Jesus’ unique way of using parables to teach Kingdom truths to his

followers. It is also true that at times he could make the people scratch their heads and wonder what on earth he was going on about, But not with this parable. All his listeners had to do was close their eyes and picture the scene in their minds eye. Nature was all around them. We, are not in the same place. In our towns and cities, the natural world can seem far away. But if we look beyond our mobiles and TV screens, we can see nature at work around us, S10 in our gardens, S11 in the fields, S12 in the parks and open spaces. If we open our eyes, we can observe the cycle of nature from seed sowing to harvest.

What does this parable tell us? Most importantly that the seed has within it the secret of life and growth. Farmers or gardeners don't really need to understand this before they sow the seed. S13 They are not creating something, because all the potential for life is contained within the seed. Farmers can help by looking after the land and creating good conditions for growth, but at the end of the day they, like us, have little control over which seed will germinate and grow once it is planted – that's the miracle of nature.

It's not down to us to create a Kingdom of God. It is already here, waiting to be discovered. We can create conditions upon earth where the Kingdom is given the opportunity to grow more speedily and more fully, or we can hinder its growth by our actions or inaction. Just as the creative power of God is contained within a seed, so it is with his Kingdom.

I wonder. Have you actually watched a seed grow? Have you seen it actually grow taller as you watch? Maybe not. Probably, you will have sown seed one day and seen nothing happen for a while. Then later returned to see the first leaves S14 pushing through the soil. Give it time and you can begin to see real evidence of growth, like the lettuces S15 I planted earlier this year. A few weeks later and we were eating freshly picked lettuce in a salad. Nature's growth is often imperceptible. Watch a plant every day and you'll be lucky to see evidence of growth. You're more

likely to notice it growing when you've been away for a while. It could be argued that the same is true of the growth of God's Kingdom. It grows unseen.

S16 Every week we say the Lords' Prayer and repeat the words "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven". Over the centuries generations of Christians have prayed these words about the Kingdom in the Lord's Prayer. Have their prayers simply been ignored? Were all those words said, empty, without meaning? I think not. Like the sower in the parable, their job, our job, is to prepare the ground well and sow the seed. We are called to be good gardeners, who sow the seed, but who also have the patience to hope for the harvest, whenever that might come – in our lifetime or beyond. As TS Eliot puts it in his poem *The Rock*, 'Take no thought of the harvest, But only of proper sowing'. We might want action now, just as we want to see our flower seeds grow and blossom within a season, but God calls us to be patient gardeners, to work to his timescale not ours. Just as there is an inevitability behind the cycle of nature which starts with a seed and ends with the harvest, so it is with God's plan for us. Over time a tender shoot **S17** can force its way, through, even through tarmac. How does it do it? By constantly growing to fulfil its purpose.

St Paul knew all about this, about living in hope of what was to come, of being a harvest people. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, he says "It's what we **trust** in, but don't yet see, that keeps us going".

Every act of love and service that we offer, every comforting or encouraging word, every time we share something of our faith with others is like a seed sown. Usually, we have no idea what effect those words or actions will have, although occasionally someone may say to us, 'Do you remember when you...' and tell us of the effect on their life of some word or action of ours. Such words or actions are like the watering and feeding that we do in our own gardens; they encourage growth, **S18** promote fruitfulness, and hasten the harvest in our lives and others. So today, as we bring our gifts for the Food Bank, **S19** to help to provide food for those less fortunate than

ourselves, let us remember that: "Every act of love and service that we offer, every comforting or encouraging word, every time we share something of our faith with others is like a seed sown"

This is what the kingdom of God is like: **S20**

"A farmer went out to sow"