

Sowing the seeds

A reflection on John 12.20-33

A few Sundays ago I was due to lead Morning Prayer on a Sunday where the above text was the set New Testament reading. It was the end of March, a week into the lockdown, a time of year when gardeners would be looking to prepare their gardens for the spring, buying plants and sowing seeds into the soil.

The reading from John's gospel tells of the moment when "some Greeks", representing the gentile world, approached Jesus' disciples and, through them, Jesus himself. It is at this moment that Jesus realises that his time had in fact come, that the reason that he had been sent by God would now be fulfilled, having earlier been adamant that his time had not come. It was the interest of those outside the Jewish faith that provoked this realisation in Jesus. During this pivotal moment in Jesus' ministry, Jesus comes out with what perhaps must seem an odd statement:

"unless a grain of wheat falls in the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

In this context Jesus was speaking of his approaching death, and that it was necessary if his purpose was truly to bear fruit – including the flowering of his own disciples and others who come to believe to take up the challenge: "Whoever serves me must follow me."

Whilst Jesus spoke about his own ministry and what must follow and why, it seems particularly poignant at this time of lockdown, when many must feel that the seeds of their own lives have been buried, either directly in the suffering that they or those they know who have contracted the covid-19 virus have experienced, or indirectly in the restrictions to their everyday lives. It must truly feel as if the seeds of their current lives have died and been buried, perhaps never to emerge again.

Whilst, as Christians, the gospel we proclaim is one of hope, as represented by Easter Sunday and the resurrection, it is also the bleakness and darkness of Good Friday that precedes it. We do not seek to hide, or, indeed to bury, these moments. There is no doubt that the seeds buried include loved ones lost to this disease, as well as businesses and jobs lost as the economy is mothballed – seeds, to adopt another parable, that have died never to bear fruit. But they also include our relationships with friends and families whom we cannot see physically, social lives, hobbies, interests, holidays and all the other things and more that made up our lives before lockdown. We can still hope that these seeds, businesses, jobs, our every day lives, our church gatherings, currently buried, will one day start to show shoots, sprout and grow again.

But perhaps we can also see those seeds more like those "surprise packets" that contain plant seeds that we sow and which flower into plants which are unexpected, but colourful and glorious for all that. That there are seeds within each one of us of things we did not believe are there, but which now planted are slowly germinating and which are currently flowering or may do so in time. Things like the appreciation of those whose work and dedication has

been taken for granted, the chance to communicate in new ways, those volunteering or offering to help in whatever ways they can, our sense of community, the chance to read or take up new interests, the different ways those who can continue to work are finding to get things done, and our relationship with nature, with God's creation. Many of us feel that we do not want everything to return as it was before, that there are things that have happened that we would like to keep.

There is no doubt that there will be much work to do in our national garden, to help tend those whose health, finances or jobs have suffered, but let us all consider how we can nurture the new shoots that are emerging or will emerge in our own lives or those of others.

Above all, we can remember the words we sing at harvest festival from the well known first verse of the hymn:

“We plough the fields, and scatter
the good seed on the land,
but it is fed and watered
by God's almighty hand.”

As we tend the seeds of our lives currently buried in the soil of the corona virus, let us remember that it is with God's help that we can feed and water them.