

## Seeds of Hope

I expect that most of us know the parable of the sower inside out. Although the disciples might have been baffled by the fact that Jesus was always speaking in parables, we have pretty much worked out what we think the interpretation ought to be – and just in case we're not sure, the Gospel writer Matthew helpfully provides Jesus' interpretation here – just in case there was any doubt in our minds. And so we deduce from this parable that the seed itself is not enough. We need, too, to water it, care for it, protect it from adversity – and so this parable teaches us to open our ears to what God is saying to us, to grow roots of strong faith, and to persevere in times of difficulty. And yet all is not what it seems. At the heart of our faith is not our hard work, our careful prayer, our determination not to give up. At the heart of our faith is that tiny seed – that small centre of life, that we can neither create ourselves nor control what it grows into. The DNA of our spiritual life is something that is primed to become something wonderful given the right conditions, but it is not, ultimately, something we can control. It has its own destiny. This seed of life that God plants in each one of us has the potential for more than we can imagine – certainly more than we can create – and despite what the parable might imply – it is very very hard to destroy.

In the early days of lockdown and home-schooling, we found purpose to our days by creating a timetable. We are quite a timetable-y family. I have discovered that the world is pretty much split into those who like a timetable and those who find it restrictive – but for us, it is a help, a support, and a guide in times of uncertainty. Each week I planned a project for the girls. One week I wrote down “deserts”. I didn't really have any idea what I was going to do with them, but I had this nagging feeling that we ought to be including geography somewhere on our homemade curriculum and it seemed to me that at the very least it would give us an excuse to do some sand art.

In an attempt to find something more educational that I could provide, I turned to David Attenborough, who, luckily, had produced an entire episode in his series on Africa, on the Sahara Desert. You may have seen it – if you haven't, it's still available on iPlayer.

In this programme, we learnt about something extraordinary. Over scenes of a ball of dead twigs bouncing about on the sand in the wind, David Attenborough tells us the following:

“Rising from the sand, comes a dried-out ball of twigs. In strong winds it can travel. This plant may have been dead for a hundred years. Yet its name suggests that all is not lost, for this is a resurrection plant. Round here, rain might fall only once or twice a year, but if you're searching for decades, that might be enough. Dead limbs absorb water and unfurl in a matter of minutes, but the resurrection plant needs one more miracle, rain must fall on its branches before they dry up and curl up again.”

The documentary goes on to show drops of water falling on the dead seeming structure, and knocking the wizened seeds from its branches. They fall into the unpromising looking ground and within an hour, green shoots begin to spring from it. There is new life, where it seemed life was impossible. Within a few weeks these shoots have flowered and developed seeds of their own. Of course, the sun dries out these new plants quickly and they shrivel and appear to die. But really we

know that they are just waiting another century or so before they can share their life with the next generation.

Nature is incredibly patient – overwhelmingly persistent – just as God is. The seed that is snatched away by the birds in the parable isn't lost for ever. As any year 3 school child will tell you, it is just another method of seed dispersal. It may take a little longer, but the possibility of life remains. The potential in us for new life, new love, new hope, never dies. And the seed of God's Spirit remains a constant within our hearts, never leaving us or giving up on us, always waiting and watching for the right conditions for growth.

We need to hear this as we adapt to a fluctuating and uncertain future. We need to recognise that there is potential for growth, faith and love in every possible circumstance.

Let us pray that we will be open to finding life, love and hope in unexpected places, that like the resurrection plant we will grasp opportunities for growth when they come our way, and that we will find ourselves able to trust in God's overarching plans and possibilities for our lives. Amen