

**Worship Material**  
**Still sowing**  
**Materials from Roots Bible Study**  
**Sunday 16th July**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

As we come before you, Lord God,  
we prepare ourselves to receive your Word.  
May we be fertile soil for you, the mighty sower,  
ever casting your seed where it might take root.  
We seek to rid our souls of stones and thorns  
and all that hinders or chokes growth;  
may we dig deep, and be open and nurturing  
to receive your message to us today.

**Amen.**

**Read Matthew 13.1-9,18-23**

**Bible notes**

This is Jesus' most famous parable. We know it so well – and yet hardly at all. It retells Israel's history: a sorry tale of not listening, of hardened hearts, exile and partial restoration, God is not with them, the nations are not flocking to Jerusalem to receive the Law – as Isaiah said about the return from exile (2:2-4; 49:8-13; 55:10-13; 65:17-25). It is a familiar story to its first hearers – they would feel its pain; they were longing for the kingdom of God to come. So, the punchline is somewhat baffling: the crop is growing (vv.8-9), the fulfilment of all their hopes is within earshot – but where? 'If you have ears...'

The disciples don't get it; but they do see that this is about more than just history. So, they ask Jesus why he's being so cryptic and what the parable means. It's important to grasp the Old Testament passages lurking behind what Jesus says here, especially Isaiah 55:10-13. In that text, God's word stands for God himself coming: so, Jesus is both sower and seed. He is both the one bringing the fulfilment of God's plans, and God himself visiting and restoring Israel, bringing the kingdom right here, right now. Are we listening?

So, Jesus is talking about the way things are. He describes two groups of people. The first are those who hear the parables and shrug their shoulders. These are just pretty stories, nothing else. They don't believe the world needs or could change. They either don't believe that God is interested in them or that God would send someone like Jesus to rescue them. So, they're not prepared to hang around for more.

But he is also talking about the way things could be. The other group is the disciples. They've been given the secret of the kingdom (v.11), because they've stayed to find out more (v.12). They are asking questions – and that is how we learn how to be disciples. Discipleship is about listening and looking, hearing what Jesus is saying, seeing what he is doing, and wanting more.

Jesus is the kingdom in action; we see it in what he does as well as hear it in what he says. The disciples have seen him heal, feed the hungry, bring the isolated into his new family – this is the secret that is revealed to them as they pay attention. Do we see it?

And discipleship is about living it, bearing fruit in our lives by hearing and doing, leaving an old way of understanding the world and God and beginning a new one in the new community God is gathering together around Jesus, based on hearing and doing his word.

### **Prayer**

God, we give thanks that you are ever on the move  
even when we feel stagnant.

Your word is not static, your wisdom not sealed and silent;  
like one who walks constantly, casting seed broadly,  
your whispers fall around us as seeds on soil.

We praise you for Jesus' teaching,  
which helps us to prepare ourselves to be good soil,  
fertile for growing the fruits of goodness and grace.

**Amen.**

### **A prayer to conclude**

Ever-giving God,  
we thank you that you have never stopped  
sowing your word among us.

Give us receptive hearts  
and make us fruitful for you in the week to come.

**Amen.**