

One of my favourite childhood memories is helping mum sow seeds in the vegie garden. She'd use a trowel to carve out long straight vees in the soil while I'd carefully follow her, dropping seeds at the right intervals. Together, we'd then spread soil on top, gently pressing it down before watering the seeds we'd just planted. One summer, we had an abundant crop of fresh corn, and I can still remember the sweet taste of the juicy kernels as we ate as much as we wanted – raw and right off the stalk.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus communicated the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven using parables – stories about everyday things like gardening that were designed to jog people out of their own thoughts and beliefs, and into realisation of how God was present in their midst. No shepherd in their right mind, for example, would leave 99 sheep unattended to go in search of one lost sheep. It wasn't worth it because there were no fences back in those days. The point of the parable is that amazingly, God does go in search of the lost sheep, and that when he finds it, he places it on his shoulders, rejoicing at having found one of his children who had strayed.

Similarly, no person in their right mind would scatter seeds willy nilly – certainly not on the edge of the path, on patches of rock, or among thorns – Mum would've throttled me. But this is the abundant, even prodigal way in which God sows and sends his Word – Jesus – into the lives of those who desire to receive him. And I'm not just talking about the beautiful reception of the Eucharist,

but about the transformational personal experience of encountering Jesus' love, joy and peace.

But Jesus' parable today leaves us with an important question. If the seed is the Word of God, and if God scatters that seed with such abundance and generosity, then what exactly is he hoping to grow? What is the harvest he longs to see in human lives? Jesus tells us that the good soil produces fruit – some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. So what does that fruit actually look like?

We could say that the purpose and meaning of human life is to know, love and follow Jesus – and it is. But another way of saying that, one that is completely in harmony with today's readings, is this: the purpose and meaning of human life is to receive the Word of God into rich soil and allow it to bear fruit. Our first reading rings out like a gong in the night: "The word that goes forth from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do."

Fruit, then, is what happens when the Word of God takes deep root in a person's life and begins to transform them from the inside out. As that transformation takes place, people begin to discover that God has a purpose for their life that draws them into deeper prayer, greater generosity, more loving service, and a desire to share their faith with others. In our parish – and I'd like to conclude with this – fruit might look like:

- A person who once came to Mass out of obligation now coming because they genuinely desire to encounter Jesus.

- Someone moving from anonymity to belonging through a name tag, a Connect Group, or a ministry team.
- A parishioner who begins praying daily and developing a personal relationship with Jesus.
- A married couple choosing forgiveness and reconciliation over resentment.
- Parents taking responsibility for the faith formation of their children.
- People discovering that their faith is not simply inherited but to be personally embraced.
- A person discerning and stepping into their God-given gifts and charisms.
- Someone who was once receiving pastoral care now becoming a pastoral carer for others.
- A parishioner who begins serving the poor, visiting the lonely, or accompanying those on the margins.
- And finally, people inviting friends, neighbours, colleagues and family members to Alpha, Mass, or parish life because they have experienced something worth sharing.

Friends, this is the harvest God is looking for. Not corn in a veggie garden but transformed lives. Lives in which the Word of God has taken root, grown strong, and borne fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.