



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Sexagesima 2021 8.30 am

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Story telling plays an important role in every culture, the whole world over.

Every society has had its story-tellers and, before the advent of Kindles, the Internet, even books and printing itself, story-telling and re-telling was almost the only way to pass on history, memory or even news.

Professional storytellers would move from one town to the next and disseminate information through their tales, quite often accompanied by music and song, which made the stories even more memorable.

Jesus, the builder-carpenter from Nazareth, stood in a long, long line of story-tellers.

His parables belonged to a tradition of story-telling which went all the way back to the ancient schools of wisdom found throughout the East from Egypt to Persia and beyond.

The parable was a story that had a meaning; a story with a secret inside; a story which set out to make a point and rarely an obvious point, but a point that would be discerned only when those who heard the story had done a bit of work for themselves to mine the story's hidden treasures.

As Jesus said, over and over again, only those who had ears to hear would hear, and only those who had eyes to see would see. The rest would think no more than ‘nice story’ and move on.

On one level the parable of the sower, like many of the parables, is simply a statement of fact: seed grows best where it finds good soil. Not much of a story though, but in the context of who Jesus was, the story of the Sower is little more than a familiar device to get people to engage in a reflection about God's Kingdom.

The way we read the parable today gives us a topping and tailing; it is ‘packaged’ by the evangelist and even interpreted for us by someone who did have ears to hear and eyes to see.

When Jesus told the parable, he would simply have told the story and left it at that. No explanation; that was the whole point; the listener would have to work out the meaning for themselves!

And working things out for ourselves is very important.

What do we ‘do’ with the story when we hear it?

We live in a culture in which instant answers and solutions are the norm. One can even do a cryptic crossword and fill in all the clues as long as you have a pen in one hand and an iPhone in the other!

We leave the thinking and the research up to up to Google or Wikipedia!

Even, or perhaps, especially, our news comes to us pre-digested. We are presented with a news story not just as a piece of neutral reportage but pre-digested and we are openly or subliminally told what to think as we read it.

In the age in which we live, it is not the storyteller who is king, but the spin-doctor!

But Jesus told stories and spoke in parables, leaving his hearers to do the thinking, to do the working out, to wonder and reflect not just on his stories but on the story-teller.

Jesus never told people what to think; he simply laid before them the good news, the gospel message of God's Kingdom and left people to work out their response for themselves.

Jesus wanted people to think for themselves, to engage their brains, to respond creatively to what he said and did; to sift through and process the raw information and to come up with an answer, a response.

Jesus and his words are full of contradictions. His disciples were full of contradictions. The Church is full of contradictions.

But, to those who have 'ears to hear' and 'eyes to see', Jesus' words are the keys to the Kingdom of God; every word pregnant with possibility and potential.

I very much hope that you don't believe everything that Wikipedia or the BBC tells you. I hope very much that you don't believe everything the Church tells you!

Stop and listen; look and think for yourselves – for that is Jesus' way, the way of the Kingdom, the way that leads to human flourishing and eternal life.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.