

Sermon for Harvest Festival 2020

Sunflower Story

Nowadays everyone takes photos on their phone but when I was a kid we didn't have mobile phones and you had to take pictures with your camera – not seeing how it might come out - and send the film away to be developed. So my Mum and Dad had photo albums of black and white blurry pictures of me and my sister growing up in Blackpool. One of my favourites is a photo of Jill – my sister – when she was about 7 or 8 (she's well over 60 now) standing in our garden next to a giant sunflower at least twice as tall as she is. When we go down memory way, she will look at it and say 'I grew that sunflower!'



She didn't though, did she? What she did was put a seed in the soil and watch it grow. The New Testament reading for today is from Mark's Gospel – a little story Jesus tells where he says that the life of God is like someone planting seeds in a field. Every night they go to bed and every morning they get up and all the time the seeds are sprouting and growing – though they don't know how it happens.

I bought a packet of sunflower seeds the other day. They don't look much- just tiny little grains. Yet when my sister planted one, it grew up to be a great big plant, towering over her. You've all seen sunflowers. A whole field of them (in France, for example) is an amazing sight. From something so small grows something so tall – yet, as Jesus says, we don't know how it happens. Growth seems a miracle.

At Harvest we thank God for the miracle of life, of growth. We thank God for all the good gifts we enjoy from all that grows – our food, for instance. And when we hear this story we remember that Jesus is talking about good things growing in our lives – good things like honesty and humility to see where we need to change. Good things like fairness and generosity to stop being selfish and care for our planet with all its creatures, animals and plants. Good things like love, joy and peace – what St. Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit which we want to grow in us..

We don't know how the seed grows into a plant. We can't make it happen. We do know that it's God who gives the growth. We can't make good things grow in our lives. It's God who gives them and causes them to grow. But we can help them to thrive..

I'm sure that when my little sister planted her sunflower seed, my Mum and Dad would have said to her 'if you want it to grow, you'll have to look after it'. (I think she had a little

watering-can.) It's like that with God's good things growing in our lives. We have to make sure that the soil is good soil. So how do we do that?

Jesus told another – longer- story about seeds and soil and growth – where he says that the seed is like the Word of God. If we listen when God is trying to get through to us and don't let ourselves get distracted, then the seeds of God's good life – the life of Christ – can grow in us. If we pay attention to Jesus (the Word of God) – read his story, spend time with him, if we give God time and space, he will do his work in our lives so love, joy, peace, will spring up and grow quite naturally...

We're in the middle of a very dark time for our world. People are worried about what's going to happen with the virus – and our area is at the moment the hardest-hit. And we are worried too about the damage we've done to the planet and how much of it can be repaired. So this is a time when we need the good things of God to be growing in our lives as never before – to bring the beauty and brightness of the sunflower into our dark world, into our neighbourhood and community, into our family.

It may be a while before I see my sister again as she lives down south. But when I do, I'll definitely ask her to find that old family album and have a look at that sunflower picture!

Let's pray that by God's grace, good things will grow in us.

Anne Samuels