

Sermon for Trinity 8

by David Wilbourne

### **Generous sowing and fishing**

Sydney Smith was the funniest clergyman of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,  
whose witticisms even managed to make Queen Victoria shed tears of mirth –  
we are definitely amused.  
He once saw a child tickling a tortoise's shell.  
'My son, that's little better than stroking the dome of St Paul's Cathedral to please the Dean and Chapter.'  
He could be quite cutting:  
'Of course I believe in the apostolic succession, otherwise,  
how else could you explain

that the Bishop of Exeter is a descendent of Judas Iscariot.'

And he was a great defender of doing as little as possible:

'I never read a book before reviewing it.

It prejudices me so!'

Contra Sydney Smith,

I do read through Sunday's Gospel

before preaching on it.

As I pondered this morning's

parable of the sower

and it suddenly dawned on me

what a very profligate fellow the sower was.

He wasn't choosy

he wasn't fussy about where he sowed his precious seed.

Shallow soil,

weedy soil,  
birds' playground soil,  
good soil,  
all are treated equally  
as he scatters his seed.  
No checks are done beforehand,  
no questions asked about orthodox soil  
or unorthodox soil:  
he simply gets on with sowing.  
One reason he just had to be indiscriminate  
is that good soil doesn't have a habit of advertising itself,  
there are no bill-boards that proclaim,  
'I'm good - plant here!'  
Good and bad are distinguished not by their promise  
but by their performance:  
generous sowing brings its fantastic reward

One hundred fold, sixty fold, thirty fold.

Don't be restrictive,  
don't be exclusive,  
be a generous sower,  
the parable encourages.

Curiously Jesus told the parable in a boat  
with his audience gathered on the seashore,  
not a place to make the most natural link  
between sowing and farming.  
Yet we make the link again today  
as we have the parable of the sower  
on Sea Sunday,  
the day we think on all seafarers and our debt to them.  
And the link isn't that forced,

in that the sea has its own harvest

missed by too restrictive trawling.

'We've toiled all night and caught nothing, Master!'

'Yeh, well that's because you haven't trawled wide enough,'

Jesus replies,

'Cast your net to starboard,

to the side you have neglected.'

Result: so much fish that their nets broke and their ships

sank.

'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men,'

urges the profligate fisher.

And as his fishers of men,

just like profligate sowers and profligate fishermen,

we should trawl a wide sea,

include not exclude.

My one prayer for the forthcoming Lambeth Conference

is simply a bid not to exclude people

on the grounds of their alleged unorthodoxy,

because once you start excluding people,

who knows on which side of your self-imposed barrier

you are on.

Once we start building boundaries

and walling ourselves in

within our nice orthodox citadel,

which should be mindful

that our Lord's greatest work,

the salvation of humanity,

took place outside the city wall,

outside orthodoxy's barricades.

As we hear cries from Lambeth

and from General Synod  
for an exclusive rather than inclusive Church,  
I can do no better than to close with some wise words  
from Ampleforth's greatest son,

Cardinal Basil Hume:

Apparently in his final days  
he recorded on video  
an address to the American bishops  
on Effective Collegiality,  
which included the following:

*I am constantly being urged  
to suppress this group of people or that group,  
or drive out of the Church this lot or that lot.  
I do not believe that is right.  
I believe that as a bishop*

*I have to try and lead people from where they are  
to where they never dreamt they might go.  
If you drive a person out of the Church  
you have taken a very grave responsibility on yourself.*

Those seeds that fell on the good soil  
never dreamt of  
such a marvellous harvest,  
from thirtyfold  
right up to one hundred-fold.

Dream on,  
you are those seeds  
on this Sea Sunday.  
Christ can voyage you from where you are  
to where you never dreamt you might go.