

Sermon Topic: **The Good Soil Project by Mr Rudy David Wong**
Sermon Text: **Luke 8:4-15**

The Parable of the Sower

⁴And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: ⁵“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. ⁶Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. ⁷And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it.⁸ But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” When He had said these things He cried, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

The Purpose of Parables

⁹Then His disciples asked Him, saying, “What does this parable mean?”

¹⁰And He said, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that

*‘Seeing they may not see,
And hearing they may not understand.’*

The Parable of the Sower Explained

¹¹“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹²Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.¹³ But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. ¹⁴Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. ¹⁵But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.

A: The Master and the Seed (v5): The Sower aims to sow seed into the land.

Personal Lesson 1: Go! And open your senses...

- There are things that can only be learnt from being in the land itself. We need to understand the context of the place before applying any pre-conceived ideas or solutions we may have to it.
- As a post-war nation, survival is the Timorese’s top priority, and not education.
- In order to help others, we need to see them as partners and as equals, not any lesser.

Statistics

- Singapore is 719.1km²; Timor Leste is 14,874km², 21 times bigger than Singapore.
- Singapore has 5.6 million people, Timor Leste has 1.2 million people

- Ermera (where the MMS hostel is located) is 768km² (larger than Singapore), with 127,283 people
- 33% do not have clean water, 50% do not have toilets, the literacy rate is 70% and employment rate, 59%

However, the needs are far greater than what the statistics show.

Senior high schools are rare in Timor as many do not continue their education to senior high [equivalent to Sec 4 and above in Sg] and the population is spread out over the land in villages. Without the hostel, students would have to walk 2 hours each way to get to the senior high school. While they can return home on weekends, a number of the students also stay over the weekend as they have come to regard the hostel as their home too.

B: The Sower has a Method of Sowing (v 4-8)

- Sower went out (v5)
- Sowed everywhere, indiscriminately. (We must be mindful of any tendencies to divide or classify people based on meritocratic notions)
- Go! (Mark 16:15, Matt 29:19)
- Preach/Teach

Personal Lesson 2: Honour and Value Everyone

The students were asked whether they felt they were valuable. Some shared that they felt useless, worthless and not of any value. However they were encouraged when they were told that because Jesus died for each of them personally, they are priceless and beyond value. It is also not true that they have nothing to offer as there is much we can learn from them (for example, their skills in chopping firewood and cooking/baking over a wood fire).

One difficulty the students face is not having enough energy for their studies, evident from the times they fall asleep in class. However, it is not their fault, as nutrition is low, and they have a lack of iron, Vitamin B12, folate and so on.

Statistics

- In 2013, 50% of children under 5 are stunted, and Timor has the 3rd highest rate of stuntedness (being too short for their age) in the world. 11% are considered to suffer from wasting [loss of strength and muscle mass]
- Malnutrition will affect capability to learn, reduces productivity, and contributes to premature death and disability
- Addressing nutritional needs, will enable better educational outcomes, better productivity and better health

More information is still being sourced on the topic of nutrition, and any expertise in this matter is welcome.

The vision for the Timorese youth is that they will have the same capacities and health as the youth of Singapore.

C. The Sower's Way of Measuring Success (v 9-15)

- Faithfulness in going
- Faithfulness in sowing everywhere

The 40 students staying in the hostel represent 40 villages, 40 communities and we must be good stewards of this opportunity. We must do all we can [to refer back to Luke – there are 4 types of soil, but the sower's job is to sow indiscriminately] and trust God for the results.

One partnership with a lady called Susan Eng is the incorporation of 8 stories from the Bible into 8 principles of farming, such that when farmers share these farming principles, the Bible stories that are connected with them will be passed on too.

Personal Lesson 3: Ground can be changed!

In agriculture,

Hard soil: Till, break the ground

Rocky soil: Crushed, remove, add compost

Thorny soil: Weed, remove to create space

Good soil: Maintain, provide cover

While the starting point of the soil is not within my control, agricultural science can make it better. Similarly, in the spiritual realm, it is the work of the Holy Spirit that changes hearts to produce a crop of a hundred fold! (Ref Luke 8:8).

The Good Soil Project

- Address nutritional needs via farming skills, caring for soil and new crop varieties
- Use nutrition as the avenue to show the tangible, practical love of God
- A means for discipleship of the hostel students
- Discipleship at the hostel is the start, but it should extend to the family, community and district
- We must impact this generation so they can impact future generations (multiplier effect)

Other verses on Missions

- "...if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday" (Isaiah 58:10)
- When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest (Matt 9:36-38). The work of God's kingdom (just like farming) needs a lot of hands.
- Being a blessing to the nations: "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Gen 12:2-3)

- Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matt 28:18-20)
- The Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) is not about....am I doing it? But.... **How** am I fulfilling it? (What is God asking us to do? What’s the next step?) “Go...teach....” are all action words!
- May we not be comfortable, lest we miss the urgency of the Gospel.
- Perspective: There is no hope apart from the reconciling work of Jesus Christ. There is no hope apart from a revival of God’s love across this country. There is no hope for our broken communities apart from the cross of Jesus Christ and His resurrection. There is no hope to heal poverty and return dignity to all people. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, He is our ONLY hope” – Dr John Perkins, Civil Rights Leader

Discussion Questions (Back to the Text)

1. What were the four types of soil upon which the seed fell? Did all four types of soil produce fruit? Why or why not?
2. What was Jesus’ reason for those who are hardened to the gospel (seeds fell on ground)? Why are they so antagonistic to Christ, Christians, and the Church? What can be done to reach “hardened” people?
3. What was Jesus’ reason for those whose faith never grow deep roots (seeds fell on rocks and thorns)? Do you think persecution or convenience is more dangerous for believers in Singapore? Why?
4. If the pursuit of “cares, riches, and pleasures of life” can choke out the faith of many, what can you do to prevent it from hindering your walk with God right now?
5. What is God saying to your about the soil of your life?