

Dear Friends,

The gospel reading for this week is the well-known parable that Jesus told about the sower. Jesus spent a great deal of his time teaching, both his disciples and sometimes large crowds of hearers. He was clearly a very effective teacher, people remembered the stories he told long afterwards. What was it that made him so effective?

Jesus spoke in language that people could understand, he used language that was relevant to the people he was speaking to. He talked about things that people knew about, things they were familiar with. There is something very natural about the way Jesus taught. That is still true now, how much more true would that have been for people of his own time.

The stories Jesus told were packed full of things that people would recognise, he used ideas and images and pictures that people could associate with. Jesus talked about fishing and farming and trading and the other activities that people were involved in day by day. Jesus used everyday examples and everyday events, things people could understand and relate to, so they felt that he was talking to them. He used the right language, the right words and ideas.

Using the right language is very important for teaching to be effective. Do we use the right language in the church today to get our message across? It isn't an easy thing to do. It isn't enough simply to repeat the images and ideas that Jesus used. Those images still have great power and effect, but we have to face the fact that society has moved on enormously over the last 2,000 years. Nor is it enough to be trendy as we shall then be left high and dry once that trend has passed. We need to find the images, the ideas and the words that speak to people today.

It is also clear that Jesus spoke to people's needs. He spoke to the needs that people felt, he answered their deepest questions, that's why his teaching was so effective. This was something that the church did very effectively in the past but has been far less successful with in more recent times. It is important that we ask ourselves what are the needs that people have today, what are their spiritual and emotional needs. It sometimes seems that most people today don't have any spiritual needs at all, they can live their lives quite happily and contentedly without ever even thinking about the church or the Christian faith.

I believe those appearances can be quite deceptive, what goes on at the surface level doesn't always reflect what people feel inside. Inside all of us there is a deep feeling of need for God. Most of us aren't aware of it most of the time, we're so busy getting on with living life, there is so much else to do. But for each of us there are times when that feeling, that need, comes to the surface. That need for meaning and purpose in life is the one that God offers to answer. For most people outside the life of the church there are times when that need comes to the surface. Do we as a church do our best to meet that need?

With best wishes,

Mark