

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A
16th July 2016

One of God's greatest gifts to us is our imagination. It enabled us to put a man on the Moon, to write beautiful music, to create art in fact we are only limited by what we dare to imagine. When I was a kid I could imagine almost anything. One of my memories of early years at school was when a Nun told the class: "If God stopped thinking about you for a second you would cease to exist, that instant." My friend Mark and I looked at each other across the desk with disbelief. At "play lunch" which for some reason was the name given to the first break in the morning, we discussed the weighty topic in more detail, we considered ourselves the intellectuals in second class so while other kids ran about we sat and talked. What did cease to exist mean? Mark said it could not mean you would die because God would still have to decide whether you had to go to heaven or hell and since God had stopped thinking about you God would not want to be bothered by you again. The best I could offer was you either went straight to hell or you just disappeared. We weren't game to ask our teacher or our parents because we knew we would be told "cease

to exist” means “cease to exist” or you boys think too much. Mark and I concluded that the same Nun had told us that God loves us therefore we were pretty sure God would not forget us. The great thing about kids is that they asked the questions everybody else is either too scared or too embarrassed to ask.

Many years later I was reading a book while on retreat and came across the phrase “We are thoughts in the mind of God.” My mind for some reason raced back 50 odd years to that playground conversation. I know God is described as omnipotent, meaning God has unlimited power. God can do anything. As finite creatures living in time we humans have trouble imagining a God with unlimited power. But the thing we have most difficulty imagining is God’s unlimited capacity to love. We either glibly say God can do anything and go on drinking our coffee and eating our cake or we say well if God loves us so much: Why are so many people dying of starvation in Africa?

But that is what exactly the parable of the sower is about “God’s infinite love”. I have heard Mathew’s parable of the sower many times. Its structure always impresses me, it’s built around the classic structure for

explaining anything, tell them, tell them again in detail then tell them again a different way.

It's easy to hear this parable and imagine you're the rich soil; you receive the Word of God and nurture it. It's easy to convince yourself that it's the rest of the world that's got a problem. But if I reflect on the passage and my personal response to the Word of God, my personal response to God's infinite love, if I listen with the ear of the heart a different picture emerges. I no longer see myself as the rich soil, in fact I see myself as all four types of ground, the path, the rocky ground, the thorns and the rich soil. The path are those difficult times when it just too hard to embrace the Word, too hard to love. The times when I say: How can I possibly forgive this person look at what he has done how can I possibly love him. The path times are times when it's just too hard so I walk away. The rocky ground is those times when I know the right thing to do and have all the good intentions but it just becomes too hard. I have decided to forgive but I find a million reasons not to. The rocky times are those good intentions that never come to fruition. The thorny ground is when I know what the right thing to do is, but I'm persuaded by others not to. For example

someone might say: If you forgive you are no friend of mine. In the thorny times I hear the Word of God but I listen to the word of the world. The good soil is when I embrace the Word of God although it might cost me I nevertheless forgive. I love irrespective of the cost, these are the times when my true self shows through, and when for a fleeting moment I become Christlike.

The mystery is that when we embrace the word of God when we act out of love we enrich our own lives. We become the catalyst for change, by our example change occurs. But make no mistake acting out of love takes great humility and humility takes great courage. It takes courage to forgive, when the rest of family wants to denounce him. But a kindly word and a hug may be all it takes to end years of bitterness. All it takes is the courage to love. Love is difficult it's easier to make you hate somebody than it is to make you love them. All I need to say this person is a good for nothing drunkard, who turned up to their niece's party drunk and you will immediately from a dislike for them. But if you bother to talk to them you may find that their behaviour is due to some tragic event that's robbed their life of love.

The Word of God is love, God's Grace is God's love freely given with no expectations. If we have the humility and courage to hear the Word of God and act in our world out of love we are only limited by our imagination. The reason why there are starving children in Africa has got nothing to do with God. God has given us the tools to fix the problem there is more than enough food in the world. The reason why there are starving children in Africa is that we collectively have dismissed the problem as too hard, like the seed that fell on the path. We collectively as a society lack the imagination to solve the problem of food shortages. God tells us what to do, we know what we should do but we lack the courage to do it.

You see that Nun was wrong, the problem is not God forgetting about us that will never happen. The problem is us forgetting about God, us forgetting God's message of unconditional love will result in endless tragedy. If we have the ears and eyes to hear the Word of God and see what needs to be done we are only limited by our imagination. Imagine a world limited only by our imagination.