

*“Know ye not this parable? How then will ye know all parables?
The sower soweth the word”*

Christ’s question conveys the hint of a suggestion that in understanding this parable we shall find the way of understanding “*all the parables.*” There is, indeed, the sense of a divine necessity to such a way of teaching, to teaching through parables, through stories with meanings; in short, through images.

The images are not nothing; they convey an understanding and they belong to the understanding which they convey. But an understanding of what? Of what can be known and of what is wanted to be known. This signifies that there are things worth knowing and that such things can be known. The whole educational enterprise might be said to stand upon this view. For such things have to be taught. There is a necessity to the sowing of the word.

In the lesson from *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, which Jill Payne read for us this evening, there is the parable and then there is its interpretation. The sower sows the word. But the emphasis is on the ground upon which the word, like seed, is sown. No doubt you have had enough of the ground after an evening and a morning of mucking about on Jakeman field! But just consider, for there is a great blessing that is to be found in your comings and goings in this remarkable and memorable week of intensity. Wonderfully enough it is captured in the lesson from *Deuteronomy* which Adam Lomas read for us. I say wonderfully because here we see something of the deep interplay between the Old Testament and the New Testament. In this case the Old Testament comments upon the New to illustrate for us the blessing of being that good ground in which the word has been sown. “*If thou shalt hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God...then all these blessing shall come upon thee.*”

The blessings listed in that lesson are more or less comprehensive of every aspect of human life. What appears as an agricultural metaphor of scattered seed extends to embrace the totality of our humanity blessed in giving heed to the word that is proclaimed. To hearken means to hear with the intent of acting upon what is heard. This is the primary biblical meaning of obedience. We note in passing that it is hardly mindless. Hearing is the principal scriptural sense signifying understanding. Obedience cannot mean a jerked-kneed response to an arbitrary authority. It presupposes that we are rational, spiritual creatures who hear and know and will what we hear and know, or, on the other hand, refuse to will and ultimately deny what we are given to hear and know.

The word that is sown here refers to the word of God, to what is revealed by God through the witness of the Scriptures. Orthodox Christianity argues that the images through which the truth of God is revealed are not indiscriminate and indifferent; they are not nothing. There are the greater images through which the

lesser images, too, have their place and their significance. Ultimately, those greater images are explicitly presented and proclaimed in the Creeds, such as the Apostles' Creed which we just recited a moment ago. It is a simple and concise summation of what the Old and the New Testament teach us about God and our life with God. The Creeds which come out of the Scriptures return us to the Scriptures in an order and pattern of understanding. There is a redemption of the images without which they are nothing and nothing worth.

These two lessons are to be seen in the context of the doctrine of the Resurrection. For the past several weeks in Chapel we have been exploring the theme of the Resurrection through various images and stories from both the Old Testament and the New. We have argued, for instance, that the doctrine of the Resurrection is the fullest possible vindication of human individuality precisely because it teaches that the body is not nothing; we are more not less than our bodies and our bodies are part and parcel of the equation of who we are. But this does not mean that in our individuality we are radically independent of a moral, social, and political order let alone the order of creation. Quite the opposite, as this Sunday would remind us.

Today is Rogation Sunday. Rogation days are days of asking, days of prayer, but with a particular emphasis upon the land and, we might say, upon our connection to the land. We are reminded that the resurrection is cosmic in scope. It signals the redemption of the whole of creation and ourselves as within the created order. It challenges how we look upon the world and ourselves both individually and collectively within the world.

And it belongs to the educational challenge of your life at King's-Edgehill. The image of the sower and the seed, you see, is not just about preachers and chaplains; it extends to teachers and coaches, to Majors and Headmasters, to parents and mentors, each of them in their own way engaged in sowing words in the ground of your souls. How will you respond?

Well consider how you have responded throughout this week of intensity. There have been IB exams, SAT exams, choir practice, musical rehearsals, chapel and, of course, academic classes; there have been sports - rugby, track and field and soft-ball; and there has been cadet drill and cadet drill and cadet trill and cadet drill; all of it leading up to a splendid musical concert, an outstanding Sunset ceremony and a well-marshalled annual inspection, and now here you are at the Church. It seems to come down to Cadets and Chapel - two of your most favourite things! But just consider.

These were all things which were required of you, things you had to do. No one said to you, *'Daughter Dear would you like to go and stand for an hour in a kilt and a tunic in the scotch mist and freeze your knees?'* What were you thinking when you

stood out there in such impressive array? Whatever your thoughts at times, you willed the necessity which was placed upon you, *"heedless of the wind and weather."* In so doing you made it yours. Necessity became your freedom. Left to yourselves you probably would never have done any of this! That is just the point. For such is the nature of the educational project at King's-Edgehill - it embraces the whole of you, every aspect of your being and it makes demands of you. You have responded very well. You have let the word that has been sown in you grow in you. That is your freedom, for such things can't be coerced.

In this past year of flags at half-mast, it seems to me that you are uniquely positioned and enormously privileged to have to do these things that have been required of you. The events of this past year have shattered the myths of globalization - the myth that markets rule, that material and economic determinism is the defining reality for politics, as if we can live independent of a moral and spiritual order embodied in real communities. The necessity is to discover the spiritual principles which underlie and inform the various forms of our individual and corporate lives, as families, as schools, as military corps, as states, as churches.

At King's-Edgehill, as many of you realize, your individual good is found in the good of the community. We struggle together to understand the ideals and principles which dignify, adorn and perfect our humanity; ideals and principles signaled in the images of Scripture and in their engagement with the contemporary world, whether you identify personally with the Christian understanding or not. We make mistakes. We mess up. We do what we know we shouldn't do. The mercy is the forgiveness of God which allows us to confront our sins and our foolishness and not be destroyed by them. The mercy is the redemption signaled in Christ's Resurrection. We rise up to walk in the ways which he has set before us. In so doing we are blessed in our comings in and our goings out. All because *"the sower soweth the word."*

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