

Thought for the day 26th May 2020 from Richard Barton (All Hallows)

Luke 8: 1-15

Why do Jesus parables often seem like riddles?

In this familiar Gospel reading Jesus tells the story of the sower who spreads seed which falls on different soils and it is only on the good soil where it germinates, and produces a good crop. Then Jesus says, “Whoever has ears let them hear. The disciples themselves don’t understand the parable and ask him what it means. Jesus says, you disciples understand the secrets of the kingdom, to others I speak in parables. He then quotes Isaiah “though seeing they may not see, hearing they may not understand”. This is Jesus at his most enigmatic. Firstly, his disciples clearly don’t understand the parable despite their kingdom knowledge and secondly, is Jesus saying he deliberately tells parables so that people won’t understand him properly – including sometimes the disciples?

Most commentaries assume that what Jesus is saying about peoples understanding of his parables is that, ironically, like the parable of the sower itself, some people will understand and believe and others won’t. The commentator Charles Pope has suggested that Jesus sometimes told what are effectively riddles in order to challenge and provoke conversation. Jesus was drawing on an old tradition of telling riddles including one Samson used in the old testament to infuriate the Philistines and which lead to all kinds of trouble!

We always need our God-given gifts of reasoning and intellect to understand Gods word. Indeed the very life of Christ was in many ways a riddle; unconventional, mysterious, counterintuitive.

What do you call a man who sacrifices his love that all may live? The Son of God – of course!

