



## **Jesus' parables as understood & interpreted from a 21<sup>st</sup> Century rural perspective**

**This represents a series of devotional studies, discussions, or sermon background material that brings a 21<sup>st</sup> century parable perspective that I believe elaborates and adds to Jesus' original parable. It gives an understanding of the rural material from the perspective of the rural people of our time.**

**The first in this series is related to Jesus' teaching about cropping by Ross Neville who has been farming in NSW for 45 years and sees and believes God still teaches through the normal life situation.**

**There are 14 short story explanations listed below under the heading 'Cropping'.**

### **Cropping**

**Seed to harvest Mark 4: 26-29**

**Sower & Soils Matt13: 3-8 Mark 4:3-8 Luke 8:5-8**

**Tares Matt 13:24-30**

**Mustard seed Matt13:31-32 Mark 4:30-32 Luke13:18-19**

**Jesus will winnow... and gather his wheat Matt 3:11,12**

**John 3:16,17 Luke 22:31**

**The resurrection body 1Cor 15:35--50**

## #1 The kingdom of God is like a Seed of wheat

Matt: 13 Mark 4: 26- 27



Some extra ideas from a 21century farmer about what a seed of wheat today can teach us about the Christian formation process.

*'The seed sprouts and grows, though he (man) does not know how' Mark 4:27*

*'What you sow does not come to life unless it dies' 1Cor 15:37*

Jesus drew parallels between a seed of wheat and a person's life.

What is a seed and how does it grow? We do know more about how it happens today than in Jesus' time!

What is in a grain of wheat?

We know that wheat is a kernel that contains protein and starch. Wheat growers in parts of the state are able to grow different amounts of protein according to the degree of cold; some varieties need 30 frosts to be able to grow to their optimum. The common number of days required for spring to turn into hot summer temperatures affects the protein. If the temperature changes quickly the amount of protein as a % of the kernel will change. From 8-9% up to 12-13%. The amount of protein is important because it determines the end use for the wheat seed. Seed with high protein is used for special markets in Asia eg. Noodles. Lower protein wheats are used for breads and cakes. The interesting thing is that wheat seeds are genetically different and though they may look the same they can all grow in an individual way in their particular environment and they then have a particular use.

*This is the same for each individual because God has a task and ministry for each person in each particular environment that a person inhabits.*

Both the protein and starch are needed as a basic food source for the seed to grow. They are transformed into glucose by moisture and the glucose feeds the cells that turn into roots and coleoptile that probes up to the atmosphere. The genetic differences determines the future protein potential of seed development, the capacity to grow with differing amounts of moisture, whether there are beards, whether the heads grow upright or hang down and the yield potential.

God created us with a diverse potential (psalm 140:13 -15) What does this imply about the diversity within any group of believers?

## #2 **‘Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains only a single seed.’**



A Christian life to Jesus was considered to be like a seed of wheat. ***‘What you sow does not come to life unless it dies’ 1Cor 15:37*** We can learn some things from the wheat process that speak to our own lives as Christians.

To grow or germinate, the seed has to be transformed, glorified. How does it do this? Jesus called this step ‘dying’. John 12:24 ‘Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains only a single seed.’ What did He mean and how is that like the human experience?

It works like this -

The starch and protein have to be converted from the inside.

The chemical process which begins this requires water and warmth. The starch is converted into glucose or sugar that can give energy to send out roots into the soil to seek food, nutrients and more moisture. Unless this root development happens the seed cannot survive and be transformed. At the same time the seed sends up a shoot, called the coleoptile, aimed at reaching the surface so that it can also obtain energy and food from the sun. The sunlight provides warmth and energy for photosynthesis through the developing leaves (the process of converting sunlight into nutrients within the plant). Both sources of energy supply are needed to provide stimulus for growth into a new body, the wheat plant. The farmer has to manage the depth that the seed is sown. The seed has to be just deep enough to have access to moisture. If it is too deep the seed may not have enough internal energy to be able to send its coleoptile up into the atmosphere and the sun.

*Just as the seed has only a small amount of feed to grow by itself, we as spiritual people cannot grow or be transformed by ourselves. We have to develop outside spiritual connections. When we make a prayer of commitment we are sowing the first seed of our faith.*

We have to send out our roots to obtain extra spiritual nutrients. This could be from such things as: the bible’s revelation of God’s plan and revelation; other Christian’s with their teaching; encouragement and example obtained through sharing in worship. Can you suggest other items? Can you give examples of how this works?

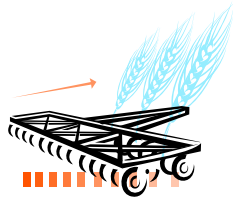
We need these supplies to provide the warmth and nurture for us to begin to grow as Christians. We also must send our version of a coleoptile up to God to be able to receive a different supply of energy. I believe this could be understood to be God providing energy both through Prayer and the Holy Spirit.

*Both a downward and outward as well as an upward feeding system are needed to power the conversion and transformation that has to happen with in us to become a new being.*

We have to develop a new heart, so we can become a new person. Can you share examples or your experience about what has fed and led to your growth and transformation?

### #3 The kingdom of God is like a seed of wheat Matt: 13

*All by itself the soil produces grain, ...., Mark 4:27*



Not only is the Christian like a seed of wheat. Jesus indicates what happens to a seed of wheat is an indication of what the kingdom of God will be like in that Christian's life. Soil or the environment around the seed is critical because the seed by itself cannot change.

Some seeds obtain enough moisture to **germinate roots and form a coleoptile** but because they are in the wrong environment, the moisture dries up and they cease growing. Unless the root system develops well (there are actually three types of roots needed) the seed cannot continue to grow just by feeding itself from within. *What you sow does not come to life unless it dies' 1Cor 15:37*

Some seeds do germinate in the atmosphere because they are exposed to too much moisture. This is called shot and sprung wheat. This seed loses a lot of its protein, starch and potential because much of this is converted to glucose. BUT incredibly some seeds still have the capacity to regerminate and grow time and again if they are placed in the right environment. Regerminate can occur 3 to 4 times. If seeds get too much moisture while in the soil, waterlogging occurs, the seed swells so much that it bursts and dies. With the charismatic movement we saw some Christians who emphasised the gifts and didn't develop their spiritual roots and they did not mature as Christians. Consider some situations when you have seen new Christians become overzealous - because they do not begin a Christian formation process, they cease to grow as a disciple or drop out.

Farm machinery technology and sowing techniques are constantly being modified and changed to help farmers provide the **best environment** for seeds to germinate.

The spacing of the seeds is important; the concentration of the seeds; the depth in the soil; the nature of the soil above the seed; the nearness of the soil to the seed; the nearness of the seed to fertiliser; the closeness to moisture; the amount of moisture in the soil at the time of sowing; the seasonal prospect for how much moisture the seed will receive over the next 5 months; the variety of seed matched to suit the climate and moisture expectations; the nature and type of weed competition expected; and protection of the seed from some diseases. Every item listed is important and predetermines the nature of the growth and the eventual yield that can be expected.

*The church, as a body of believers, acts as the 'farmer' for other Christians. They can provide the appropriate environment and conditions for Christian growth and maturity.*

I think the church could learn from farmers for the continual need to change and modify the way the seeds of faith can be sown and nurtured in other people. There is a parallel and parable about all the considerations the church can and needs to make to provide and create the best environment in all the above wheat seed considerations.

Density, spacing, closeness to moisture, need for moisture, planning, fertiliser assistance, weed eradication, disease and pest protection, matching the seeds with the environment. What is the equivalent spiritual or church practice?

#### #4 The kingdom of God is like a Seed of wheat Matt: 13

*All by itself the soil produces grain, First the stalk, .....*

*Mark 4:28*



The kingdom of God forms within the Christian life in a number of stages that can be interrupted or shape the way we develop as Christians. Some ideas about how we know a wheat seed multiplies and develops can help us understand how our faith and witness is shaped.

A seed germinates, then develops a root system and puts out a coleoptile (shoot) that pushes up through the soil into the air and sun. It has to then go through 2 stages, a vegetative phase followed by a reproductive phase. The vegetative phase is critical to determining what potential yield could result. The number of **tiller's buds** (potential head forming stalks) is determined at this very early 3 and 5 leaf stage of the wheat plants life. We all come to forks in our lives when we could go in a number of directions.

*The opportunities to experience or be exposed to some extra training, study or ministry direction happen repeatedly in your growing career life as well as your spiritual life.*

Can you remember the critical formation events that have shaped your effectiveness now as a Christian and/or the potential pathway you have followed or not followed as a Christian?

A plant begins to tiller at the axils of the leaves. The number of tillers is limited by the amount and the production of energy from the emerging leaves. The leaf growth and development now depends on the amount of photosynthesis (sunlight converting capacity to make energy into nutrients). Photosynthesis is restricted by a number of factors: the temperature; moisture; the amount of Carbon dioxide in the air; the length of the day; sunlight and the amount of nutrients supplied by the root system.

More tillers appear than can possibly survive but some just stop growing. The actual number is strongly influenced by the competition from other plants or weeds. Can you remember some potential tillers, branches of potential ministry, in your life that stopped growing because you lost spiritual energy?

*Spiritual formation and development is critical in this equivalent vegetative stage of a young Christian's life.*

Our prayer life, our ability to train ourself with practises that will help us to be receptive to God, our study of God's revelation of himself historically and in the lives of others – these are the root development and the form of photosynthesis that will determine what our Christian witness results will be.

The environment we as young Christians immerse ourselves in affects how we grow. What have been the spiritual equivalents of: competition, temperature, moisture, carbon dioxide, day length and sunlight in your life?

Discipleship formation has to happen beyond Sunday school or youth group and happen at a deeper level if we are to effectively survive the struggles of life as a Christian. The potential tillers developing in our life, at this time, I understand to be the life and spiritual experiences that will enable us to produce spiritual fruit in separate parts of our lives later in life.

## #5 The kingdom of God is like a Seed of wheat Matt: 13

All by itself the soil produces grain, first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. Mark 4:28



A Christian begins to live in the kingdom of God and can bring others into the kingdom if conditions are right - just as a grain of wheat can multiply. How are these conditions parallel to the Christian experience?

**The reproductive phase** of a wheat plant won't occur until at least two stimuli are present in the correct quantities: low temperature and day length. These two conditions produce a hormone that begins to stimulate budding and flowering in each stalk. This begins wheat ear development followed by grain filling. The amount of wheat ear development depends on the source and supply of nutrients. A forming head of wheat can be elongated to the potential of up to 25+grains long. Two opposite rows develop along a stalk at the same time. If moisture and nutrients supplies are plentiful this can expand up to 4 double rows (8 rows of grain). That's right! Today's wheat heads have been known to produce up to 200 grains and if there are 8 tillers from that one seed there are now 8 x 200 grains. We have developed wheat breeding a lot since Jesus' time. Likewise with technology, Christian witnessing tools give us levels of multiplication of disciple growing and formation never possible before and these tools are available for almost every believer.

*The Christian needs a spiritual stimulus to begin ministry and for the early Christians it was the physical evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit. Can you name your stimuli or haven't you experienced a stimulus?*

The grain buds and tillering stages are very critical to the final yield result. They can, and are interrupted by: diseases such as rust and mould (both can inhibit nutrients flow); lack of moisture and nutrients (the root development has not been adequate); or frost (this will kill the flowering buds). Can you name some of the equivalent spiritual outside inhibitors that can or have limited your spiritual growth in this development stage?

***#6 Good seed produces a crop, a hundred, sixty or thirty fold what was sown***  
***Matt 13:8 & 23***



**Jesus** expects every Christian to go and tell others the good news about the kingdom. This multiplication of our own joining the kingdom is like the multiplication of the wheat seed and we have similar inhibitors.

**The grain filling stage** is when the whole plant puts all its energy and nutrients into developing grain. There is a flowering and pollinating period that can be over one week that makes the plant especially vulnerable to temperature nutrient and moisture availability. If frost occurs at this time the flower, stamen and stigma are frozen and die. Parts of a head of wheat or the whole head of wheat can be affected. Likewise rust in the leaves of the plant can create hole in the stem that allow moisture to leak and reduce the water, nutrients that the capillary action of the plant uses to feed the ears as they flower and fill. The grain starch to fill the grains comes from the leaves and the exposed ears of wheat. The protein in the grain comes from the leaves and the soil. The duration of this stage is determined by moisture and temperature which both influences the starch and protein content of each grain as it develops. After the grains are filled, dehydration and hardening occurs.

*It is interesting that this could imply that people need to, at some stage in their Christian walk, put all their spiritual strength and energies into disciple making but this makes us especially vulnerable.*

There are events or circumstances that can interrupt the amount of flowering and growth in your spiritual walk and witness. Have you been especially vulnerable over a particular time period in your life?

The actual yield of each wheat seed and plant is critically determined by the environmental stresses during the early growing and development stage. The water and nutrient supply are critical in determining how well a plant copes at the tillering stage and at the flowering stage.

The environment we place ourselves in with our work, recreation, leisure and family determine the stress level we will face. Paul warns us in Phil 4:8

*We have to focus our thought, thinking and our mind on pure things of God especially during busy parts of our lives when stress levels increase. It is through our developed spiritual formation root system of connecting with God that we will be fed during these times.*

Our spiritual supply obtained by prayer and claiming the Holy Spirits power and presence will be our nutrient supply system in times of stress and if we get through the times of stress we can begin to bear fruit just as a grain of wheat does. Psalm 1:3 'We can be like a tree planted by streams of water' our root system is well developed.

## #7 When people hear the message of the kingdom..... it is like a sower who places the seed...

Jesus emphasised the impact of 4 different soil properties affecting the gospel message growth in people lives.

*The first type of soil mentioned are:....hard..... (a compacted path) these people don't understand and quickly leave the faith.....*

*Matt13:5ff Mark 4:1-13 Luke 8:5-15*

Jesus says the message of the kingdom is received by people in the same way as different soil types receive and grow wheat. A parallel can be seen between what happens with today's farmer as he sows seed and the responsiveness of people today.

### The sower **places the seed**

Due to irregular rainfall and continuous droughts Australian farmers have to pay special attention to their soils if they are to produce a crop of any sort. Soils and the amount of moisture they contain are critical to any crop production. Jesus indicated in his parable of the sower the parallel between the receptivity of people to the gospel and the way their faith develops and survives with these soil types. Our understanding of this in today's terms can add extra dimensions to Jesus' parable.



Soil moisture content is related to the soil particle shape and the amount of air space between particles. The placing of the seed near to this moisture as well as near to fertiliser is critical and machinery today has press wheels and differential seeding tubes to ensure this happens. The porosity of the soil allows moisture to move through the soil. Different soils with different amounts of clay have different potential porosity but they are all affected by compaction. **Soil compaction** such as under a tractor, implant wheel, an animal or human footprint puts pressure on the soil and reduces the available pore space and therefore water availability. Also the seed cannot be placed deeply enough and is prey to birds scratching for grain. Farmers today have tram wheeling paddocks so that all implements only travel along the same path to alleviate the impact of vehicle tracks. Some elect not to graze stock on a paddock at all or if they do have stock they do not graze if the soil is wet because of the degree of compaction that results from the hooves of the animals. The modern GPS driven equipment is satellite driven and allows the compaction tracks of an implement wheel in a paddock to be minimalised to the nearest 10cm. Moisture can be understood to be equivalent to the sap that runs through us when we are grafted onto the vine so that fruit can result.

*Moisture is the equivalent of having God's Spirit running through us and causing change and growth.*

Farmers are changing their farm practices because they understand the impact of their old practices.

What are some practices in the church that, as Jesus indicated, creates a hardness of heart that impedes spiritual growth?

What are some church activities that we see leading to a shallow faith or a misunderstood version of the actual gospel message that the church is meant to represent?

Do you recognise times in your spiritual walk when you have stopped growing because you have not been near enough to moisture or fertiliser to keep growing?

## #8 Jesus emphasised the impact of 4 different soil properties affecting the gospel message growth in people lives.

*The second type of soil is .... Not deep..... (rocky or shallow usually deficient)  
These people last a short time but have no roots, no moisture, and can't survive  
trouble & persecution..... Matt13:5ff Mark 4:1-13 Luke 8:5-15*



Shallow or hard pans in the soil stunt or stop crop growth and we can see how farm practices and church practises may have to change to prevent this happening.

For many years farmers used implements and European cultivation practices that worked deep alluvial soils to the depth required for seed germination engineered for a soil type very different to the generally **shallower soils** that we have in Australia. Over years with multiple cultivations this led to the development of what is described as a hard pan in many areas (a layer of soil horizon at about 30 mm of depth that became a hard barrier to root development and moisture penetration). To penetrate this hard pan implements had to be especially invented that would deep rip the soil to allow water and root systems to penetrate below this depth. In poorer, skeletal soils, there is generally poor soil horizon development because there is not enough depth before bedrock. These soils have very little capacity to hold moisture and crops will burn off whenever they have a hard dry spell. The shallow soil types and many other soil types in Australia are typically deficient in some basic elements needed for healthy plant growth. Phosphorous is the most common missing element and then nitrogen and often in some poorer soils some trace elements such as Molybdenum or Boron. All of these problems reduce the amount of root development, the health of the plant and the amount of access to moisture that allows continued growth in times of stress.

*Some life practices interfere with people developing a deep root faith system that enables them to cope with life's troubles.*

This may be through clergy dominance of all Christian practices that you should be learning? Some practices or events in people's lives actually form a hard pan that won't allow people to develop spiritually beyond a certain point. It can be the church environment, an event or can it be a spiritual formation bad practice that creates a barrier? What could be the equivalent of trace element or phosphorous deficiency? I wonder if it may not be exposure to multiple personality spiritual gifts and Christians in different walks of life! We are meant to be corporate believers and exposure to many types of Christians helps us see and understand better how to cope with many troubles and persecutions.

**#9 When people hear the message of the kingdom..... it is like a sower who places the seed...**

*The third type of soil Jesus talked about was:*

*soil .... full of weed seeds... people who allow worries, wealth, pleasures, desire for things to compete for and choke spiritual development priorities...*



Weeds are one of the biggest problems most crop growers face. Christians in society today have a tremendous amount of competition for the Christian message to take hold in a person's life. The parallels are obvious.

The amount of organic layer on top of a soil (mulch) we now know makes a tremendous difference to the amount of moisture penetration as well as the amount of drying out of the soil. The soil carbon content is a good measure of this and the practice of direct drilling of crops, stubble sowing and minimum till are practises that are being used extensively. The problem with all these methods is that there is no management or **control of weed seeds**. Most of these methods of sowing are combined with chemical control of weeds before sowing if possible or after sowing when the nature of the weed germination is identified. More sustainable practices are not as effective in the short term to manage weed infestation and they include: rotation of crop types with different seasonal growth characteristics; pre management of weeds by mowing or spray topping; cultivation to prevent weed seeding; strategic grazing, burning of stubble or variety selection of crop with a different seasonal growth pattern to common weeds; harvest and grain hygiene; sowing density and depth of crop seeds. The weed problem is the greatest problem for all croppers. The easy control strategies may be the simplest and quick fix but it is often not sustainable and can lead to more complex problems as farmers are finding with chemical resistance by some weeds.

*One of a Christian's biggest challenge today is the competition they face to have a correct balance in priorities.*

Often the quickest and easiest solution for a Christian is to withdraw from society and not have any non-Christian friends or non-church activities. Only worship and fellowship with people of the same theological belief and comfortable with the same Christian practices. Why is this not healthy and sustainable?

What are some helpful sustainable practices that a Christian can learn as part of sustainable spiritual formation to help cope with society's temptation to become too busy, to consume, to make money or own property, to enjoy yourself with the worlds pleasures?

#10 *The fourth type of soil Jesus talked about was:  
.....good soil.....people who hear understand and produce  
disciples...  
Matt13:5ff Mark 4:1-13 Luke 8:5-15*



*'We can be like a tree planted by streams of water' our root system is well developed  
and we can survive all sort of difficulties.*

*Psalm 1:3*

There are some soils where everything is right to be able to grow a good crop and some people have all the conditions needed to grow in faith and share that faith with others, multiplying the message. Just as the soil requires a team effort of many components and elements there is a need for a team effort to grow and yield as a Christian.

**Good soil** for crops are soils with the right soil particle structure, the right balance of minerals and elements, and an adequate depth of soil that will allow moisture and root systems to penetrate. In really good loamy soil, water probe metres are used to determine the amount and depth of moisture present. This can be matched with the water use efficiency of a variety of wheat, added onto the anticipated rainfall events and therefore water available to the plant likely over the growing season an anticipated yield can be calculated even before sowing. To then optimise this potential yield the addition of nutrients and fertiliser during the growing phase may be added to improve and maximise the resulting yield. In this good soil earth worms grow. Earth worms themselves multiply and move up and down the soil digesting, mixing, aerating and bringing nutrients nearer to the surface for plant roots as well as allowing moisture penetration of rain to extend further down the soil profile. The organic matter in the top layer of this soil absorbs moisture carbon and nutrients that all help the wheat seed development.

*Even in good soil conditions plant development can be enhanced.*

*What are some Christian formation processes that will enhance the spread of the gospel and Christian discipleship making?*

The soil to be good and productive requires a balance for so many elements and even then supplementation can improve everything even more. What has been the balance of people, events, circumstances and situations that have helped your acceptance of the gospel that have enabled it to grow to fruition?

**#11 ‘Didn’t you sow good seed where did the weeds come from...’  
Matt 13:27**



Even in the church today people see non-Christian activity and attitudes. We should not be surprised at this according to Jesus there will be counterfeit Christians. What do farmers do about weeds today? How do they cope? Can we learn from them?

In farming today, in Australia, we recognise that some seeds lie dormant for long periods of time. (15 -20 years) Weeds are the biggest problem for most grain production. A weed seed can ruin the final product and with the extensive practice of crop rotation it is an increasingly difficult problem. A tiny amount of oilseed or mustard seed in a quantity of wheat can reduce its use from high return milling wheat to low quality stock feed wheat. At delivery points samplers will count the number of foreign seeds in a certain size random sample. At a silo a grain truck can be rejected for receipt. A shipload of bulk grain has been rejected from offloading at certain ports because of the level of impurities.

Some weeds can be identified as soon as they germinate they look distinctively different as a plant. Other weeds are almost non distinguishable as they grow, some grow a clockwise twist to their leaves, wheat has an anticlockwise and if they are in a row together it is almost impossible to tell apart. The sort of weeds in Jesus’ parable were called tare. They looked like a wheat plants but had distinctive seed that has a terrible flavour, a slight narcotic, enough to ruin the end product. In Jesus’ day they had to be handpicked out when all the grain was harvested. *Jesus is implying some people will look like Christians, will grow up in church with other Christians, they will convert other people to act like the Christians, but it is only when they form disciples or are harvested we discover they are not and that they can ruin a whole church ministry.*

Is this too hard for you to accept? Talk to people who have left the church or have been hurt by the church and you may get another perspective.

## #12 Let them both grow together until the harvest Matt:13:30



Having weeds in a crop is not always disastrous. It can toughen up the wheat, or the church as it tries to eliminate distractions or falsehood. To control most weeds farmers have to use a multiple number of strategies: cultivation, chipping, spraying to eliminate the viability of the seed production, grazing or mowing weeds before they go to seed the years before, sowing alternative crops that will crowd out or choke weeds to prevent them germinating. The ideal is to eliminate weed seeds before wheat seed is sown. At the time of sowing and immediately afterward it may be necessary to spray the ground to prevent certain specific species being able to grow through the poison or to spray with certain chemicals that will only damage specific species of weed. It is sometimes not economical to spray to eliminate certain weeds because the reduction in yield or the discount will not be enough to cover the cost or damage for weed treatment. At harvest it may be necessary to bale all the straw or plants and remove from the paddock. Sometimes it is necessary to burn the straw to burn the seeds on the ground so that they won't germinate. All these processes work on the assumption that wheat is best when it has no competition. Recent agricultural practises challenge that assumption and practise. Farmers sow pastures or legumes in with the wheat. They have also discovered companion planting can occur sowing wheat directly into native Australian native grasses. Because some of our native grasses are annual plants they have a different growth cycle and timing to wheat and if the wheat is sown next to the dormant root system the wheat plant roots can follow the annual plant down to greater depth as the moisture is trapped and channelled by the native plants even though it is dormant. The yields may not be as great as a monoculture crop but there are almost no inputs, chemicals and it is sustainable.

*Jesus indicated it is worthwhile leaving the weeds in the crop sometimes. The diversity of theological positions and experiences are a sign of different parts of the body.* Not everyone is a hand. How can having non Christian friends actually strengthen a person's faith and experience of God?

**#13 Let both grow together ....I will tell the harvesters....then gather the seed and bring it to my barn. Matt 13:30**



At death and judgement there is a separation and accounting and every farmer knows how critical harvesting is to obtain the purest and best from the life of the seed.

At harvest time the harvesters have to be set to thrash the grain heads at a certain speed and quantity to remove the grain from the heads most effectively. This removed grain is then sieved in the machine to separate anything that is different to what is a normal sized grain of wheat. Yet some or sometimes in some crops many impurities cannot be removed completely. Jesus said the harvesters will separate the weeds and the by implication the poorer quality wheat. In his day it was done by hand.

At the grain receival delivery point for any grain going to market or to a buyer there is extensive testing to determine the quality of the grain, the protein and the weight, and also the level of impurities (weed seeds) present in the sample. The other impurities that downgrade the quality are improperly formed grains, pinched grains, grain that cracks or breaks during harvest, shot and sprung grains, grains that would not accept the level of threshing to remove the husk that protects them as they grow (white heads) smut, black spot, colour or diseased grains are identified and assessed.

*Do you agree there are different grades of Christians? Some are tested and go through more rigid testing in their Christian walk than others some crack some are pinched. Pinched grain can be high quality and have all the reproducing qualities of full plump grain. Some grains protect themselves with a shell so much that almost nothing can remove that protective covering and they are not as much use in growing disciples.*

In some seasons there is little option for a grower but to organise another wheat grader to come and sort out, using different sieve plates, grains that differ too much from the average after harvest. The grain is too valuable and its effectiveness and quality is damaged by the level of grain impurities or malformed grains of wheat.

*Jesus indicated it is not up to us to grade or separate people but we are to leave it to those who will do the judgement and harvesting. That is not our task.*

How do we manage living with this mixture of Christian people in our churches?

The Uniting Church believes in 'unity in diversity' and the inclusion of all people as a 'church of reconciliation'. How does this make it hard to stand for, or claim membership of the UCA in your community? What groups in society find these concepts most difficult to understand? Is this a hard thing or should it be something we should rejoice in accept and expect?

***#14 The kingdom is like a mustard seed...that a man plants.... but.....  
when it grows, outside the garden, it is like a tree Matt13:31-32  
Luke13:18-19  
Mark4:30-32***



Jesus says the message and the establishment of the kingdom of God may extend beyond what any of us might imagine. A farmer in the NW NSW and gradually moving south curses the mustard seed. You can find all types wild mustard, mustard is part of the Brassica family which in Australia includes, various species of mustard, horlock, wild turnip, rape or canola most are less than One metre tall. It is a tremendously invasive weed that suits most soil types and likes winter and spring rains. It spreads along the road by being blown: from lorries of grain, from out of paddocks in the wind or harvest machinery as it moves from area to area.

It looks pretty when in flower, but it does stink, especially at flowering time, it is invasive, hard to control in crops and will restrict cropping options unless it is controlled. Because the seed is so small it passes through most harvest machines and can contaminate loads of wheat and render them useless for bread flour.

When the seed germinates it has broad leaves that spread, covering the soil and crowding out other plants. Each mustard plant can produce up to 10,000 seeds. Species of mustard are sown as a commercial crop and it is sown in some vegetable and herb gardens for domestic use. Some mutations and some species grow wild and grow into larger plants up to 3 or 4 metres tall as happens in Israel, South America, India and China.

These alternate species are most likely the mustard Jesus was alluding to in this parable of the kingdom. A common commercial seed sown in the garden that produces a small plant 1 metre high can not by itself regenerate into another form as a tree 3 -4 m high. Jesus obviously wasn't using this parable to illustrate how something small becomes big because as a carpenter he would have known and used any number of commercial tree examples.

**The Christian message and experience can begin with a small humble common action word or deed that can grow unexplainably and often unknown to the original sower into something much bigger and multifunctional than the original intent.** Anyone who has taught Sunday school or helped with youth groups are always amazed at where the seeds of faith sown grow and what they grow into. Share some Christian life experience where something grew away from your original understanding and purpose.

How do you see the Christian gospel spreading like Brassica plants around the world?

**#15 Jesus will have a winnowing fork in his hand and he will clear his thrashing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn. Matt 3:11-12  
Simon, Simon Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. Luke 22:31**



In today's farming language John would say that Jesus will harvest the crop of souls with his harvester. This machine will thresh out the grain from the chaff and other impurities. The pure grain will be taken to the silos and the chaff and weed seeds will be destroyed. This sounds as if it will be painful and it is for the seed of wheat.

What actually does a harvester do to separate the grain? What does this parable imply about the separation of Jesus' followers from the rest of humanity? The harvester today combines many operations into one machine. The straw is cut and funnelled into spinning drum or an axial flow drum that has a controlled speed and the straw and heads of wheat are compressed into a closely confined space between steel bars. The heads of wheat have the grain separated from the husks and straw by physical force. Older style harvesters after this thrashing then moved the grain upwards through grates and sieves that shake and further separate the grain from the chaff. A uniform size and shaped grain is collected and the straw and chaff are pushed out the back of the machine in windrows. Axial flow headers centrifuge the grain through sieves and send a more pulverised straw and chaff out the back to be spread across the ground or immediately made into hay bales. Very small grains and foreign seed shapes are separated and disposed of independently to the whole grain and chaff. The almost pure grain is stored in a bin on the harvester then augured into a trailer or a following truck which takes the grain into bigger forms of silo storage.

*What is the nature of the winnowing Jesus will be doing to humankind?*

*It is sometimes forgotten that it is the wheat seed which goes through a rough time.*

There will be a cutting, shaking and threshing that everyone will go through. This will be a shock to the system. The head, family or church we belonged to will be removed from us. The separation will remove our shell, husk or human body and expose the pure seed that is our soul and this is what Jesus wants to see and save.

#16

**Jesus will have a winnowing fork in his hand ..... gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.**

**Psalm 1:4 identifies who/what the chaff is... The ungodly...are like the chaff Isaiah 5:24**



Why would Jesus deal with us the same way as wheat and chaff? Is chaff so terrible? In the early mechanical harvesting days the chaff coming out the back of the harvester was often burned to eliminate foreign seeds, dry vegetable matter and weeds.

Burning was also once understood to be helpful building up the carbon ash that was then incorporated into the soil soon after burning to build the soil up for next year.

The burning of the residue from the crop has been a practice for centuries. It has only recently been understood that the burning actually can do more damage to the soil in the climate we have in Australia and is actually destroying what could be a useful by product for next year crop. Burning stubble and chaff exposes the soil and makes it vulnerable to wind and water erosion. It also reduces the water penetration potential of rain into the soil profile to grow new plants. Using the straw and chaff as a mulch actually absorbs water and protects the soil from drying or eroding. New machinery and chemicals allow the seeding of wheat into significant quantities of straw mulch. Chemicals are also now used to control foreign plants that may be carried over in the chaff or are in the soil to interfere with next years crop. We can also use chaff or straw today to provide mulch for mushrooms or emergency roughage for livestock. Fire has been an instrument for cleansing of the soil from one years crop to the next.

*What are the implications for passing the gospel on from one generation to the next with this parable? What are some of the chaff, weeds or straw we build up in our lives for our generation that help us sow and harvest the gospel. Do we recognise that much of this that may actually interfere with the next generation's task of sowing the gospel?*

Are some of our inflexible buildings, music and structures sometimes chaff that should be removed and destroyed from one generation to the next?

We know from the silo explosions and the fires that sometimes occur in silos that wheat dust and chaff are a highly volatile and explosive mix that is extraordinarily difficult to extinguish. Even today it is almost an inextinguishable fire that can only be quenched by the elimination of oxygen. The winnowing process has to completely remove all impurities of dust and residual chaff or else the whole wheat grain stockpile is vulnerable to internal combustion or explosion. The flour produced by the grain will be compromised. Jesus is implying that we have to purify ourselves by obeying the truth 1 Peter 1:22 James 4 :8 Purify our hearts. Our faith and our lives have to be pure. If any impurities remain it can have devastating longer term consequences on the survival of our souls. Are there impurities in your life still?