

**Diocesan Sermon - Ordinary 15A, 12 July 2026**  
**on Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23**  
*by Fr Frederik Le Mesurier*

There are some passages in Scripture, that feel like puzzles waiting to be solved. And then there are passages like today's. The Parable of the Four Soils seems almost too obvious. And just in case it weren't, Jesus even explains it. So what am I standing up here for? What is left for me to say in a sermon?

I think there is a temptation to think that, since we are the ones who come to church, we are the good soil. And all those people who aren't here? There's something wrong with them.

But, if we're honest, most of us don't feel like good soil all the time. We want to be, of course! But often we feel rocky, or thorny, or hardened by life. And the answer cannot be "try harder." It cannot be "be more perfect." It cannot be "you're failing at faith."  
That is not the voice of Jesus.

The good news here is that these four soils in the parable do not indicate four different types of people; they indicate four different conditions of the heart. And that is something that can change.

Jesus begins the parable with the seed that falls on the path, soil that has been trampled, compacted, hardened. The seed cannot sink in. It cannot be received. This is not a moral failure of the soil. This is the result of what the soil has been through. It has been walked on and this is the consequence. It has been damaged. It is a wound.

Some hearts become hard because life has walked all over them. Disappointment, betrayal, trauma, exhaustion: all these things compact the soul. They create defences. They make us wary of hope. We stop letting anything in because letting things in has hurt us before. This soil represents the heart that has learned to protect itself. And protection is not sin, just a method of survival in the face of danger.

But hardened soil can soften. Not by force, or by shame. But by gentleness. By trust. By the slow work of God's love pressing into the cracks. By community that treats us with tenderness. By practices that allow us to feel again. The hardened path becomes good soil through kindness.

Next, Jesus speaks of rocky soil, where the seed springs up quickly but has shallow roots that do not protect it. This is the heart that is hopeful but fragile. It is a heart that longs for salvation, but which also is easily hurt; a heart that, when bruised, can be so overwhelmed by fear or pain or shame that it retreats again.

In psychological terms, this is the person who has never been given the conditions to develop deep roots, the person who has missed out on stability, secure attachment, the experience of being held and known.

Roots require:

- safety
- patience
- repetition
- trustworthy relationships
- the ability to tolerate discomfort

Rocky soil becomes good soil through the slow work of uncovering what lies beneath the surface – the fears, wounds, and old stories that block our capacity for depth. Depth grows slowly, through healing, through practice, and through learning (often for the first time) that we are safe enough to stay.

Then Jesus describes the thorny soil, where the seed grows, but everything else grows too. The worries of life, the lure of wealth, the demands of others, the noise of the world. The good seed is choked. This is overwhelm.

Thorns are not sins. Thorns are survival strategies that have grown wild. Anxiety, people-pleasing, perfectionism, fear of disappointing others: these are thorns. They choke our capacity to hear God not because we are failing, but because we are overloaded.

Thorny soil is the heart that has never learned boundaries. Everything gets in. Everything demands attention. Everything feels urgent.

Thorny soil becomes good soil through pruning, through learning what to say no to, what to release, what to stop carrying. Through discovering that not everything deserves space in the garden of the soul, and we are allowed to say no, and prioritise what matters to us.

And then finally Jesus speaks of good soil. But notice, he never says good soil is the soil that tries hardest, or knows the most, or behaves the best. Jesus says the good soil is the one who “hears the word and understands it.” Good soil is simply soil that is receptive.

But understanding, in Scripture, is not intellectual. It is not about being smarter or more theologically sophisticated.

Understanding in scripture, is something less about head knowledge, and more about a deeper integration. It is something we experience, a shift in how we see the world and ourselves.

It is when the word reshapes our desires.  
When it reorders our fears.  
When it becomes lived, not merely known.

This is the spiritual-psychological work of becoming good soil:

- honesty about what condition your soil is in
- curiosity rather than shame
- compassion toward our own inner landscape
- letting community help tend the soil

But it is not work we have to do alone. In fact, I would argue that this is work we can't do alone. Good soil is not a personality type. It is the result of cultivation.

Good soil is not perfect soil; it is the soil that has been tended, soil that has been cared for, soil that has been healed. So today, the invitation is not to judge yourself by which soil you are. The invitation is to notice what condition your soil is in, and to let God tend it, as we face the slow, honest, sometimes painful work of becoming receptive to grace.

The sower is still sowing.  
The seed is still falling.  
Grace is still reaching for you.

The good soil is not the soil that tries the hardest.  
The good soil is the soil that lets itself be loved.

Amen.