

The Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, is about to lead more than 20 bishops and their teams for the 'Crossroads' Northern Bishops' Mission across Lancashire. Starting at Blackburn Cathedral on 8 September at 2pm and finishing with a Celebration event at Preston's Flag Market on September 11 at 4pm, more than 400 events have been organised over the four days of the Crossroads Mission. Many of these events take place in the Lancaster area and you can find details about everything that is happening at www.blackburn.anglican.org and on social media, including #crossroadslancs, @cofelancs and @crossroads_info.

So what will happen during this exciting time? Perhaps I can best explain by reference to a parable that Jesus taught about a farmer sowing. Some of the seed was lost almost as soon as it was sown since it fell on the beaten paths around the fields only to be eaten by the birds. Some seed fell on places where there was only a thin covering of soil over rock.

It grew for a little in the rainy season, but the roots could not go deep, and when the hot weather came it withered. Some of it fell in places where there were thistles growing and in due course they grew with the wheat. It was an unequal battle with the vigorous weeds choking the wheat. Finally, other seed fell into good soil, grew steadily, and produced the all-important fruit, the yield being thirty, sixty or even a hundred times the amount of grain sown.

So the message of Jesus, brought by these visiting missionaries is like seed that is creative and produces new life.

His word is like life-giving seed. Sometimes that word is like the seed on the path, meeting with no response or understanding and being immediately rejected or forgotten. Sometimes there is enthusiasm at first, but the hearers immediately give up when things get hot, ie when there is pressure or any kind of persecution. Sometimes there is response, but then the word is gradually strangled by competing forces, the cares of the world, the deceit of wealth and desires for other things. But finally those on the good soil are those who listen to the message, receive it, and in due course bear fruit, living out in practice the Christian story.

Jesus encountered just such experience in his own ministry. He faced blind rejection from some. He encountered others who were interested in him, but who were eventually not prepared for the cost in terms of suffering or material sacrifice. But Jesus also saw the seed take root in his disciples and with painful slowness grow and bear fruit.

The parable and the Crossroads Mission are exhortations to consider where we fit into the picture. It's a challenge to ensure that we are responding in a way that will bear fruit.

+Geoff