

## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

### FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A

#### First Reading Isaiah 55: 10–11

Today's passage comes from the end of that part of Isaiah known as Second Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah (chapters 40–55), written towards the end of the Babylonian exile (587–537 BC). The people of Israel had seen their world completely destroyed and been sent away to live in exile in foreign lands. In fact, many of them thought their God had deserted them.

So Isaiah seeks to give them some hope. Even in the worst times, God is with them.

The word of God is life-giving, transforming the life of the exiles. It does not return empty handed, but rather feeds the body and soul of the people.

The metaphor comparing the word to rain and snow is a very powerful one for those who live in arid conditions. It comes from heaven, and the prophet's audience knows the effect rain has on the earth and how important it is to produce growth and in turn seed, ensuring food for the next year.

Comparing the word of God to seed is an apt image in the light of today's Gospel of the parable of the Sower.



#### Gospel Matthew 13: 1–9

Throughout Matthew 12, Jesus has been encountering mounting hostility, and it looks as if his mission to the House of Israel has failed. Chapter 13, read today and over the course of the next two Sundays, uses parables in order to explain.

##### **Jesus left the house**

It is generally thought that this house is the one he lived in in Capernaum.

##### **Such crowds gathered round him**

It is estimated that the crowd will have been of several thousand people.

##### **He got into a boat and sat there**

Sitting down is the traditional position for a rabbi teaching his people. The sea is the Sea of Galilee.

##### **He told them many things in parables**

Parables are multi-layered stories from everyday life, with a twist. They are designed to disturb and get the audience to work out their deeper meaning. A parable is easy to remember, to reflect on, and understand its hidden message. It challenges everyday assumptions. It is also a non-confrontational way to defuse hostility.

##### **Imagine a sower**

Jesus knows he is addressing Galilean farmers who would easily connect with sowing seeds. He builds on their experience of using a lot of seed and getting a poor yield. At first sight, the sower appears wasteful, throwing seed onto unprepared ground. However, we could also focus on the generosity of the sower who tries to get seeds to grow even on infertile land.

##### **A crop of a hundredfold**

The 'fold' is the relationship between the amount of seed sown and the amount harvested. In first-century Galilee, a yield of tenfold to fifteenfold would have been the norm. Here the yield is much greater (a hundred, sixty, thirtyfold). This is an indication that the parable is not really about actual seeds but is a metaphor.

##### **Listen, anyone who has ears!**

With these words, Jesus is inviting his audience to listen carefully, not just to the words they hear but also to their deeper significance.

There are different ways to listen to and profit from what we hear, just as there are different soils which give different yields.