

Sermon on 12th July 2012 Matthew 13: 1-9, 18:23

“This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.”

These words of Winston Churchill in a speech, not broadcast after Dunkirk, as the recent film claimed, but in 1942 about the Battle of Egypt, would have been appropriate, perhaps, before last weekend. The rush to the pubs might have been foreseen, but it was an understandable reaction to a partial easing of lockdown.

I celebrated the evening by eating a whole bar of chocolate; all of it, on my own without any guilt feeling at all. I had resisted the temptation for 110 days and it somehow seemed appropriate.

I know that the pandemic is still far from over and we will all have to maintain social distances and other precautions for an unknown period of time, but last weekend just gave a small message of hope to everyone.

In the book of Isaiah, chapter 55 verses 10-13, which is the Old Testament reading for today, we read about the return to Jerusalem from captivity and exile in Babylon by the Jewish people. They have been in despair and now, at last, they receive messages of hope; hope for a new beginning; hope for new heavens and a new earth.

Isaiah says: “You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord’s renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed.” This is a great promise to a people freed from exile. Joyous words.

Today, we are in a situation where we are free, but not in control.

We are not in captivity but our normal life is curtailed. Above all, we

have an unseen danger which is ever-present, and which we do not understand.

Perhaps this is an opportunity to take stock; to re-examine our faith and decide on our true path. In the gospel reading today, we are given the choices that we can make.

In the parable of the sower Jesus outlines four alternatives for his disciples and for us. A sower is sowing by broadcasting seeds on the ground and they fall in different ways.

Are we like the seeds that fall on the path, where we do not truly understand the message and let it be snatched away by allowing other things to become more important?

Or like the seeds that fall on rocky ground, when we become immersed in other enthusiasms and our faith is shallow. Are we like the seeds that fall on thorny ground and allow the worries of the world to choke out our best intentions? Or are we like the seeds that fell on good ground. We hear the message, understand it and use it to change our lives and the lives of others, through words and example; by spreading it and proclaiming it to all whom we meet. This is a very familiar parable and we listen carefully to these four alternatives, with the best intentions to choose the right path. In listening it is easy to think about the seeds but forget that it is also about the sower. Jesus teaches in parables and this parable is not only about an unknown sower but about Jesus himself. It is about his ministry to us; so that we who hear his words and believe, may then go out ourselves to spread the good news of salvation to others. This is our mission; to spread the Gospel; to be sowers of the seed.