

September 2023 – The Parable of the Accidental Sunflower



The summer is all but over. September is a time when gardeners start to prepare the ground for winter. Outdoor furniture is covered up, Lavender is cut back – and the leaves start to fall. There is still the odd wasp, but they too will soon be gone.

I am no gardener, but I do like feeding the birds, and it was this action that brought ‘accidental joy’ into my Summer. From bird seed, grew an enormous sunflower – still strong right up to the middle of September!

I live opposite a school, and as soon as the schools started back, my enormous sunflower became the talk of those on the school run. It even made the local Facebook Page and Sheffield Star newspaper! How proud I was of this majestic and glorious flower – even though I had done nothing whatsoever to aid its growth – no cane to stable it, no watering, and definitely no Baby Bio! And yet it grew and grew and grew to over 12ft tall. It would sway in the gentle wind, setting off my Ring Doorbell sensor. In a strange way this was quite delightful – it was as if my sunflower was letting me know she was still there, growing and standing tall, while I was busy elsewhere. The tallest sunflower ever recorded was in Germany in 2014 – 30ft tall!!!

The scientific name for the Sunflower is ‘Helianthus’ from the Greek words “helios” (sun) and “anthos” (flower). The flowers are originally from North America and every bit of the plant is edible! We eat the seeds, we cook with sunflower oil, and it has so many uses. Spanish explorers brought the seeds back to Europe in the 1500s. They are known for their resilience and ability to thrive in the harshest of soils and they have been used to cleanse contaminated ground from toxins. Following environmental disasters such as Chernobyl, scientists planted millions of sunflowers to help the land recover.

Although Sunflowers are not mentioned in the Bible they are used in Christian art, often depicted as a symbol of divine love, adoration, and faithfulness.



Artist – Yongsung Kim

Sadly, the wind came, uprooted my flowery friend – and she fell. Sadness descended upon our house, and all the children walking to school noticed she no longer towered above them.

I won't forget my accidental flower – What I had never intended to grow brought me and many others so much joy, but it also brought sadness when her season was over. The rain was just too heavy and the wind too keen for such a tall, unsupported body with such shallow roots. The inevitable was always going to be the inevitable, unless of course I had intervened prior to the bad weather and sought to save her. The trouble was, I didn't get round to it. Just like the growth and size of the plant took me by surprise, so too did her quick demise.

In the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23) we learn where the seeds 'end up' and what happens to them... What is so beautiful about this Parable is the absolute abundance and generosity of our Father God. What if the Parable is not about the soil... but rather the Sower who sows extravagantly, flings seeds all over the place, who feeds the birds, who is not scared by thorns and who is confident that there is enough seed to go around? Our God who keeps on confidently sowing – regardless of the ground because there might just be a surprise, an accidental growth in the harshest of places – that will bring joy to those who see it bloom, even if just for a season.

Our God is so generous. As Barbara Brown Taylor writes about Matthew 13, "The focus is not on us and our shortfalls but on the generosity of our maker, the prolific sower who does not obsess about the condition of the fields, who is not stingy with the seed but who casts it everywhere, on good soil and bad, who is not cautious or judgmental or even very practical,

but who seems willing to keep reaching into his seed bag for all eternity, covering the whole creation with the fertile seed of his truth”.

What does the Parable of the Sunflower teach us? Perhaps next year we should have a WRU Sunflower Growing Competition!



<https://www.appleyardflowers.com/flowerdiaries/sunflower-facts/#:~:text=In%20Greek%20mythology%2C%20the%20sunflower,with%20the%20sun%20god%20Helios.>

<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/the-sowers-generosity-2022-09-01/>