

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, announced this past week a government funded 50% discount on eating out, on Mondays to Wednesdays in August, up to a maximum discount of £10 per head. It was the surprise rabbit he pulled out of the proverbial hat as a crowd-pleaser in his emergency summer statement. 'Eat out to help out' is the slogan. What does this mean? What does it mean for the government to spend £10 on one meal when there are families in this country for whom £10 of basic food has to last a whole week?

Much has been said about the experience of lock-down changing our values, revealing what is truly of value; a moment to reassess what we prioritise in our lives. Much has also been said about building back in a different way, a greener way. And this shines a revealing light on a great difficulty for a consumer driven economy. If we wish to save our economy in the short term we must 'go forth and consume'. If we wish to save and share our planet we need to consume less.

The parable of the sower in today's Gospel comes complete with its own homily and explanation from Jesus himself. It needs little amplification from me. But there is a large question left unanswered: how do I make myself into fertile soil in which the seed of the Word of God can germinate, grow and produce its crop? I am painfully aware of my soul's rocky patches and thorny weeds. How do I make the change?

Jesus' words seem almost harsh and elitist. The mysteries of the kingdom "are not revealed to them." Why not? Careful reading reveals that it's not that the mysteries are withheld, but that "the heart of this nation has grown coarse, their ears are dull of hearing and they have shut their eyes." The mysteries cannot penetrate.

There is a warning then, a warning about becoming coarsened, set in our ways, content with what we know and shutting out all else.

The gift, yes gift, of lockdown was that it smashed things up, forced us to see and hear new things, and to see and hear old things differently. It was, and is, an opportunity to change: as individuals, as a church, as a society and as a world. And now, as we begin to emerge, is the time when we shall see whether any of those changes will stick.

I challenge myself first. When we were in full lock down, I shopped once a fortnight and that had to do. What I didn't have, I didn't have. I exercised outside every day because I could only do it once a day. But now there are days when my only exercise is a quick potter down Monastery Lane for whatever in Tesco's I fancy for supper that evening. Am I letting the gift slip through my fingers and away?

Will we go back to the way we were? Will we shop til we drop, and then stuff ourselves in a government subsidised slap up meal? Or will we do it differently? Or how about this: eat out in August to help out if you can afford it, note the 50% you would have paid without the subsidy, and give that to a charity that will feed those who can't eat out to help out.