

Sermon: Seeds, Seeds, and More Seeds

7/12/2020

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

This summer, my wife, Mallory, and I have spent a lot of time working on our yard. We have planted new grass, ripped out ivy, pulled up weeds, put in garden boxes, trimmed bushes, moved tons of rocks, and had two paths and a sprinkler system put in. My hands have been buried in mud, tinted green by wet grass, gotten coarse and cracked, and been covered in cuts upon cuts. At this point, nothing would make me happier than to never have to think about, let alone do, yardwork again. So, naturally, the Gospel lesson assigned for this Sunday is “The Parable of the Sower.” Surely, God must have a sense of humor, and I must admit that I was more than a little tempted to choose another passage, practically any other passage. At that point I wasn’t being very picky. But then I read something very interesting about today’s Gospel lesson. In each of the three Gospels with parables—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—“The Parable of the Sower” is the very first one. It, quite literally, sets the stage for the other parables, meaning that there is something important in it that Jesus and the Gospel writers wanted for us to understand. Something that, no matter how tired we are of yardwork, should not be swept aside.

“One day,” we hear Jesus tell the crowd, “a farmer went out to sow seed. Some of the seed that he scattered landed along a path, where it was eaten by birds. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it quickly sprouted, but its shallow roots were soon scorched by the sun. Some seed landed among thorns, which outgrew the plants and choked them out. Finally, there was the seed that landed on good soil, where it brought forth a bountiful harvest. Let anyone with ears listen!” But listen to what? Now, those gathered around Jesus, standing on the beach that day, knew a thing or two about farming. They knew that a good harvest depends upon many

things. You need to plow the field, put down fertilizer, provide irrigation, plant the seeds far enough apart, pull up whatever weeds and thorns may grow, and chase away any birds looking for a free meal. Getting a good harvest, back then and today, is not just about throwing out some seed and hoping for a miracle. It requires careful planning, constant attention, and hard work.

So what was Jesus seeking to teach them? That they are the farmer or that God is? That seed should only be planted in good soil or that it should be scattered everywhere? That what grows in our lives depends upon what type of soil we are or that their fields could produce so much more? That day, there were many in the crowd whose hearts were so “dull” that they would not accept Jesus’ teaching. So, in accordance with a prophecy in Isaiah, Jesus took the disciples aside and taught them its meaning; meaning that they would seek to pass on to those under their spiritual care, all the way down to us worshipping together today.

“God longs,” Jesus began, “to sow faith in our hearts and lead us to a place of insight, deeper connection, and understanding. This is what God desires for us, and yet there are some who hear God’s Word and do not understand it. These people are like the seeds sown on the path, trampled underfoot and eaten by birds. In their hearts, nothing grows because they have no faith. The rocky soil,” Jesus goes on to say, “is like a person who hears and accepts God’s Word with much joy. At first, their faith shines brightly, until they realize that the roots of discipleship dig deeper than they are willing to go. It is then that their faith withers like a plant under the hot, scorching sun. The soil filled with thorns is also a person who has heard and understood the Good News. Their faith has taken root and they are ready to flower and fruit. Except that they cannot break the grasp that wealth holds on their lives, and the security and assurance that it promises to provide, and eventually have their faith choked out. And finally, there is the good

soil, the person whose seed experiences no barriers. In this person, the Good News takes root and flourishes, producing an abundant crop with enough grain for many.”

Heard in this way, “The Parable of the Sower” is a cautionary word for everyone who has heard God’s call. It warns us to not take for granted that we are good soil. Yes, we are gathered here today because we have heard the Good News. But have we allowed for it to fully take root in our lives? John D. Rockefeller, when he was the wealthiest man in the world, was asked how much money was enough. He said what I imagine you and I often think: “Just a little bit more.” The danger with wealth, among other “cares of the world,” is that no amount will ever be enough. We will always be left wanting more, consumed by the need to have more, until this never-ending desire chokes us off and prevents us from bearing fruit.

And then there are the rocks, those versions of the Christian faith that promise smooth sailing. They say that all we need to do is believe this, do that, or give so much and our bank account will be full and our sorrows empty. I must admit, these accounts are enticing. The last few months have lain bare just how quickly everything can be taken away. It sure would be nice if we could know that, no matter what the future might bring, we have nothing to fear; that we will always have everything we want and need. But then we read the Bible and recognize just how at odds these versions of the faith are with Jesus. From Jesus, we hear that all those who follow him will have to bear their own crosses. Being a Christian will not all be smooth sailing. Grapes have to be pressed to become wine, olives have to be squashed to become oil, grain has to be threshed to become bread, and Jesus had to be crucified to save us. How many rocks are buried in our lives?

Yes, today’s parable is a cautionary word, and one that often focuses on us. One in which we are asked what kind of soil we are and what we need to do to make sure our faith is not

scorched or choked off. This is a message that we all need to hear. We all need to take stock of our lives and do a little yardwork. And yet, I imagine that I am not the only one feeling a little uncomfortable. Not at the thought of yardwork, mind you, we all know that discipleship requires work. But at how much it centers upon us.

Imagine that you are good soil. You have no rocks or thorns. You have been plowed, fertilized, and irrigated. By all accounts, there is no better soil in the entire world. You should yield an abundant crop, but when the time comes to harvest, there is nothing there. “How can this be,” you think to yourself, “there is no better soil than me, no one more worthy of salvation. Why didn’t anything grow?” Because nothing can grow if nothing was planted. No matter how hard we try, no matter how much work we put in, we are not the farmer. God is. God is the one who sows faith in our heart and in the hearts of others. God is the one who scatters the seed so that it might take root in our lives, and not just a little here or there. God scatters seed everywhere and in every way imaginable, because you never know where it might take root.

The day Jesus told “The Parable of the Sower,” the crowd was so large that he had to get into a boat to be heard. For many of them, listening to Jesus was like watching a blockbuster movie or attending a concert; it was just one of many ways to pass the time. So when Jesus finished preaching, they went home, their lives unchanged. God had sown seeds far and wide, touching each of their lives, but the seeds did not take root. There were some among the crowd, though, who heard and embraced the good news. They let the seeds take root in their hearts, some for a day and others for their entire lives, and through their ministry the Christian faith spread from Jerusalem to all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the world.

Today, God is still sowing seeds. Seeds as far as the eye can see, seeds on each and every type of soil, hoping that they will take root in our lives and produce an abundant harvest. Such is

the abundance of God's love for us. There will never be a time when God is not present in our lives, sowing seeds, offering us new life. What kind of soil are you? Anyone who has done a little yardwork knows that even good soil has its rocks and thorns. It is not perfect, just like our lives are not perfect. Remaining good soil requires that we do yardwork each and every day. Perhaps that's why I wanted to pick a different passage when I first read "The Parable of the Sower." Because I needed to be reminded that no matter how tiring yardwork might be, it is necessary, both outside and in our hearts. Amen.