

Sowing Seeds

The parable of the sower is the first parable in the first Gospel, Matthew's gospel.

In a sense, the parable of the sower is a parable about parables.

Today, Jesus is letting us know that the way into the kingdom isn't through dogma or doctrine as much as it's through surprising insight and undeserved serendipity.

So in the weeks ahead, Jesus will tell us about mustard seeds and yeast.

And treasures hidden in fields.

And pearls of great price.

And great hauls of fish.

Jesus uses every one of these parables to sometimes nudge us, to sometimes scandalize us, to sometimes shock us, into catching a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.

Some parables may just leave us scratching our heads, like seeds falling on rocks.

But others just might hit home, like seeds landing in good soil.

Probably I told you about my first day in homiletics class in the seminary, back when I knew nothing about the gospels, or anything else for that matter.

That day when I said, during my first sermon ever, that the parables are lovely sweet stories intended to convey a simple message.

And how, upon hearing those words, the professor fell off his chair and grabbed his chest, horrified that one his students could think such things!

Jesus tells parables not to sooth or comfort us, but to blow up our preconceived notions of how things are.

For example, when Jesus takes his seat in that boat on the water's edge, he knows full well that he's addressing a community of people who have come to believe that God is only on **their** side.

People who believe that God is looking out for only **them**.

How little has changed over the millennia, eh?

As we watch the fallout from those who can't imagine that God loves all of us, even those who don't conform to the expectations of the majority.

As we today find ourselves in the midst of fear-driven hatreds of "the other."

As frightened folks find themselves drawn to demagogues who pander to fear-driven, even virulently racist, hatred and bigotry.

Today, Jesus confronts that same kind of crowd.

And in the face of that crowd, Jesus starts throwing hand grenades in the form of this story about the sower.

This wasteful sower who throws seeds of the kingdom everywhere you can possibly imagine.

Not just on the select few.

Not just on the so-called worthy or deserving, but on everyone.

Indeed, this sower is covering every person, every nation, in fact — covering the whole wide world — with the seeds of the kingdom.

In Jesus, God is taking back his world, and taking back his people.

Not only the few and the deserving, but the whole lot of us.

And listen in on how God sets about accomplishing this task.

It's not with rockets red glare or trumpets in the sky.

Instead, he's taking over in ways that are subversive and mysterious.

Subversive to the way things are.

Mysterious in its humility and gentleness.

All so that we may learn to see with Kingdom eyes, and hear with Kingdom ears.

So today, and for the next few weeks, Jesus is going on and on about seeds, so that, if we listen well and look carefully, we may come to discover that the Kingdom of God is something like a seed.

Seeds are very small.

And Jesus is particularly fascinated with the smallest of seeds.

Like the mustard seed.

Seeds that are almost impossible to see.

Seeds that seem to just disappear into the world.

That's what the kingdom is like.

That's what the Word of God is like.

That's what Jesus is like.

How different from what we imagine when we imagine God moving in the world.

Nationalism and racism try to turn Jesus into a kind of Rambo; armed to the teeth and shooting up the bad guys.

The gospels tell us loud and clear: that's a lie!

Because Jesus comes quietly; with a hand that is open and a heart just waiting to pour grace into any soul that's willing.

How easy for us to miss him.

Like a seed that disappears into soil.

Where it dies.

And yet,

“What does all of this say about Jesus?

What does it say about his ministry in the world?

He comes to his own, and his own receive him not.

He’s despised; the stone that the builders reject.

If we want to find him walking among us, don’t look for a thirty-something bearded Jew, but look for him in the face of the sick, the imprisoned, the hungry, the naked.

He’s right over there, standing around the open fire with the houseless.

And to top it all off, he’s the Word of God, sown in the field of the world, where he dies.

Then rises.

Then vanishes.

All of his work mirrors the work of the seed.

It happens secretly, mysteriously.

It happens in a way that can neither be known nor felt, but only believed, only trusted.” Capon, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 68 (paraphrased).

My daughter loves to comment on my sermons.

The usual response is: “That was a good one dad, but instead of going around and around, why don’t you just get to the point?”

A fair question I suppose, and a bit cheeky.

So I tell her about Emily Dickinson who advises:

Tell all the Truth
but tell it slant
[For] The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind.

That is to say, in less poetic language: "there is no direct understanding of the kingdom: it's a strange thing, and people's minds are dulled." Paul Nuechterlein.

Jesus says as much when, after explaining the parable of the sower to his inner circle, he quotes the prophet who says:

"Listen and listen but never understand!
Look and look but never perceive!
This people's heart has grown coarse,
their ears dulled,
they have shut their eyes tight to
avoid using
their eyes to see,
their ears to hear,
their heart to understand..." Mt 13:15

And again:

"I will speak to you in parables,
I will unfold what has been hidden
since the creation of the world." Mt 13:35

When we try to get "right to the point" (as many would like in our instant gratification fast-paced TikTok world), when it comes to the

mystery of the Kingdom of God, what we get with that approach is not insight — but comic book images of a heavenly place that matters only after we die, where we lounge about on fluffy white clouds, strumming harps and yawning.

But if we are willing to really lean in on what Jesus is planting in us, we may come to see that the Kingdom is not simply waiting for us after we die.

It's right in front of our face, yours and mine.

Now.

This very second.

The mystery of God is not waiting for our physical death before it reveals itself, because that would undermine the entire project that Jesus is ushering in: inviting us to join in the great adventure of making God's good creation new.

Which requires us to unlearn the usual human story filled with division and strife.

Which requires us to unlearn looking at myself as good soil and the other guy as bad soil.

Because the most basic field into which God sows his grace is in my own life, which is, more often than not, an ugly concoction of rocks and weeds and thorns.

But sometimes, from time to time, God's grace finds its way into good soil too.

Good soil that bears the fruit of extending God's limitless love to others – of all shapes, sizes, colors and languages.

And so today perhaps we can pray that my heart and my life, and that your hearts and your lives, may become that good soil.

Soil that delights in welcoming the seeds of the kingdom.

The seeds that God herself plants, with utterly joyful abandon.

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