

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears^[a] listen!"...

¹⁷Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it. ¹⁸"Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Deuteronomy 11:13-21 pg 168 OT

¹³If you will only heed his every commandment^[a] that I am commanding you today—loving the LORD your God, and serving him with all your heart and with all your soul— ¹⁴then he^[b] will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil; ¹⁵and he^[c] will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you will eat your fill. Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. ¹⁷Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut up the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you. ¹⁸You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem^[d] on your forehead. ¹⁹Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ²⁰Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, ²¹so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your ancestors to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

“A Fresh Start”

Let anyone with ears, listen!”...that’s what Jesus said as he moved to his boat to teach the large crowds gathered on the beach. “Let anyone with EARS, listen!” It really seems that what Jesus was about to say was critical to his message and ministry. But what was it that anyone with ears, and all of us have them, need learn from a parable about sower, some seeds and some soil? Maybe it is something that would be helpful as we begin a new year, as we take a breath, as we set our new year’s resolutions, as we are making a fresh start in so many ways.

Well, ok then. Jesus told a parable of a sower who cast seed onto four types of soil. First, beat down soil, a path, where birds could come and eat the seed. Then, rocky ground, where the seeds had little place to send down roots. Next, soil among thorns where the thorns would choke any plants that would grow, and finally, good soil where seeds could take root and be transformed and grow and grow, yielding fruit, which of course, would include more seeds, 30,60,100 fold.

When asked, Jesus explained the meaning of the parable, which he did primarily in terms of the various soils, but note that he also defined the seed. He defined it as the word, the message of God, the transforming good news of God which has the potential to change and grow and produce new fruit. Jesus explained that the beat down soil symbolized the person who hears the word, the message of God but does not understand what they hear. These people he said are vulnerable to having the message snatched away from them and to following other messages that are not of God. In our time, maybe that could translate into having the message snatched away by the pounding busyness of our secular schedules or by the attitudes that religion is simply another subject than a way of life. The rocky ground, he said, is the person who hears the message and receives it with joy but because they have no root, the message endures only a little while and when trouble or persecution arises they immediately fall away. Feel good emotionalism is quite different than the deep joy known by surrendering all to Jesus as Lord and Master of our lives, isn’t it? The soil among the thorns is the person who hears God’s word, but the cares of the world such as wealth lure them away and choke out the message so that they cannot produce good crops. This is such a deceitful soil. As Rev. Jimmy Allen says,

“People will flock not to a lie, but to a near truth.” In his assessment of this soil, he thinks of some popular preachers today. He says, *“Winsome speakers with entertainment and promises of prosperity are always such popular figures, but Jesus did not come to entertain or enrich us with worldly goods. He came to reveal the will and reign of God and call us to demonstrate it, declare it, and bring the Good News to beleaguered lives. When he calls us to him, it is not with an easy cure for our hurts but a power to change and sustain our lives.”*¹ The final soil Jesus described is the good soil, the person who hears the word, understands it, is continually changed by it and then bears fruit, indeed a great harvest of others who know the love of the Lord.

Upon hearing this explanation, those who were listening back then and most of us now certainly begin to consider which kind of soil we are or maybe which type soil our neighbor is. Each of us likes to think we’re good soil, bearing bounteous crops for the Lord. But truth be told all of us have been any or all of the four soils at some point in our lives. We’ve been worn down and depressed, so down trodden like the path that we’ve denied the good news of God with us, of God for us. We’ve had a burst of enthusiasm for God’s message of salvation by grace alone, and then watched it fade away when hardship comes, haven’t we? We’ve been lured away by money, power, or some other promised prosperity. Yes, there’s good reason why the explanation Jesus provided about this parable was in terms of the soils. He explained the meaning of the soils for “all who have ears to hear” maybe because that was the way it needed to be most urgently heard.

But, you know, as I considered the text this week and studied other’s thoughts on it, I was struck with another perspective, one that is too good not to pass onto you. Many of the people whom Jesus was speaking to were farmers, or if not farmers themselves, they lived in the agrarian community and were most assuredly thinking also about the sower as Jesus spoke. In fact, Jesus called it the Parable of the Sower. And they would have known right off that the behavior of the sower was extremely reckless. They’d likely have been bothered that the

¹Jimmy Allen. “Response to the Good News”. https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf2002697/response_to_the_good_news (accessed 1/4/20).

sower was so wasteful. Seed was expensive, and a wise farmer would have been much more careful that his seed would have landed only on soil where it could grow.

When I was a little girl, I recall visiting my grandparents' home, both farmers, and helping my grandmother plant and care for her enormous garden. She planted most of her seeds one by one to just the right depth and covered them with the rich black Iowa topsoil. By the time I was planting with her in early summer, the soil had been well prepared, no rocks or sticks to contend with. Her hands worked quickly, planting and covering in one continuous motion. Everything was according to plan. The vegetables which would grow tall were planted along the edges so as to not block the morning sun from the shorter ones next to them. Those that required the most water and had the deepest roots or those that spread out the most were planted in places that gave them that space. Thrift and care was the name of the game. Every inch of the garden was used and used wisely such that the greatest harvest would be most possible.

The fact that some of the seeds in this parable fell on the path, on rocky ground or amid thorny weeds should have resulted, the listeners knew, in a poor overall result for this reckless farmer. But yet...but yet, Jesus explained that the yield was 30, 60 and even 100 fold, when the normal yield at that time would have been 4 or 5. Those that have ears need listen.

What could Jesus be trying to teach here? What else was important for these budding disciples, for us, to hear? Could it be that the sower was not an example of recklessness but of generosity or hopefulness? Could he be somewhat like the father in the story of the prodigal son or the host of the wedding at Cana? Maybe the sower wasn't being wasteful or careless at all. Maybe the sower knew exactly what he was doing all along...showing extraordinary extravagance...extravagance even to the point of seeming wastefulness, even to the point of giving to all regardless of pre-conditions. As Rev David Ewart says, "*You and I might not waste our efforts on the beat down, the thorny, and the hard-hearted, but God does!*"² Yes, God may be understood in this parable to be the sower. And God casts the Word all about

² David Ewart. "Holy Textures" <https://www.holytextures.com> (accessed 1/3/20)

without regard for where it lands, loving every type of soil, rich and poor, showering it with love, grace and mercy.³ In fact, the Word made flesh was cast into the cracks and crevices of the bad and broken soil of tax collectors and the ritually unclean, the sick, the Samaritans, the women...all, even sinners like us, were covered with mercy and the love of Emanuel, God with us.

Brothers and sisters, the seed, the transformative message of God, the good news, is given to us as we enter this new year to help us form and grow into better disciples and to put down even deeper roots for lifelong discipleship.⁴ It's given to us so that we can be transformed and bear fruit, 30, 60,100 fold....that is, so that we can simply love with the abandon that Christ has loved us ...no matter in what soil we find ourselves right now, or later during the coming year....or in what varied soil the people placed in our path are found, the people whom Christ loves, and by extension whom we need love.

It's been said that *"The calling of us, the community of disciples, is to have two good ears, and to be constantly open to having our worn down places ploughed up, turned over, our rocky places named and removed, our shallow soil deepened and enriched, our thickets of cares and anxieties plucked out and space cleared for new growth."*⁵ Friends, Jesus, our Emmanuel, has come to be with us and for us, to help us make fresh starts this year, to sow his extravagant love upon us, and to speak his empowering word to us. If you're yet open to making a new year's resolution ...Listen! Let anyone with ears, listen!"...Amen and Amen.

³ Keith Anderson. "God, the Crazy Farmer." https://day1.org/5876-god_the_crazy_farmer/comments (accessed 1/3/20).

⁴ Vital Congregations Initiatives definition of Lifelong Discipleship Formation. Mark #1

⁵ David Ewart. "Holy Textures" <https://www.holytextures.com> (accessed 1/3/20)