
THE DIRTIEST STORY IN THE BIBLE

I saw a sign that I think many of us would like: “If all else fails, try doing what your parents suggested.”

- Again, I think a lot of us would like that sign, or more accurately would like to give that sign to someone else.
 - Is there anything more frustrating that to see someone you love following a course that can only lead to heartache and despair, and yet not be able to help them through it?
- Why won't they turn back before it's too late?
- Don't they see what we can see and what we know from experience?
- Why won't they listen?

JESUS experienced that same kind of frustration with those who came to hear HIM teach.

- So, to try to help them see the source of wisdom, JESUS told them the parable we have recorded in today's gospel.

Now I will admit that while some of us do some gardening and know a bit about growing things, for the most part, the Parable of the Sower doesn't really fit with our culture that much.

- Scattering seed may not make any sense to us who plant our gardens with nice rows of seeds carefully placed for the best results.

In JESUS' day, this story picture made sense.

- Fields were not fenced off, so when it wasn't the growing season, many would take short-cuts across the fields tramping down hard paths even through the middle of a field.
- That tramping also turned up small rocks and created thin soil.
- Those rocks were often not removed and seed was allowed to just grow around them and among them.
- Seed was just flung here and there, falling wherever it might.
- And turning over the soil to cover the seeds might not happen for several or even many days, leaving it exposed.
- And no herbicides were available to use to protect young plants.

All of that led me to wonder how JESUS might have told that same parable today, here in this place.

- Perhaps rather than a sower and seed, JESUS might have used a parent and her children:

A mother gave her children a very important lesson to guide them throughout their life.

- *One child, though, was watching TV and never heard a word her mother said.*
- *Another child listened, but once he started playing with his toys, the words of his mother were forgotten.*
- *A third child listened carefully and tried to follow the words of his mother.*
 - *But when friends teased him and others put pressure on him to act differently, he finally abandoned his mother's guidance.*
- *One child did listen and followed the words of her mother, and later in life made some very good choices for herself, and for her family, and for those with whom she worked.*
 - *Many people came to look upon her as wise and person to provide guidance and many of them, too, followed that advice.*

In JESUS' time and place, the Parable of the Sower made sense.

- Most people could relate to scattering seed and trying to grow a crop.
- But in terms of the Kingdom of GOD, they still didn't see the connection.
 - Even JESUS' disciples asked for HIM to explain it to them.
 - Perhaps a bit of explanation might be helpful for us today as well.
- So let me spend this morning, breaking up the dirt, if you will, and helping us to better understand the parable.

1. The hard soil represents a "closed" mind.

- Either because of lack of understanding, personal biases or prejudices, or simply an unwillingness to consider the need to change, many are not willing to hear what GOD has to offer.
 - It's what we sometimes say, that the "words fell on deaf ears."
 - There are those who hear the good words of JESUS, but because of stubbornness or fear of the unknown their hearts and minds too hard to really receive JESUS' teaching.
 - They simply aren't open to really listening to JESUS' message and so HIS words never take root so that it can easily be snatched away.

2. The rocky soil represents a "fair-weather" mind.

- These folks listen to the words of JESUS, but there are so many other voices in their lives that they go from one teaching to another.
 - JESUS' words may sound good in the moment, but in the long run, there might be something that seems better or easier.

Televangelist Joel Osteen has the largest church in the country.

- He has achieved this, I think, by telling people what they want to hear about GOD, rather than what GOD is actually saying.
 - He has proclaimed that the HOLY SPIRIT would never force someone to do what they did not want to do.
 - That's the kind of HOLY SPIRIT we would like, isn't it?

But when you read the Bible narratives of people like Abraham, and Jonah, and Moses, and Peter, and Philip, we see that the SPIRIT very much leads people to the places where GOD needs them,

- and that, often though difficult and uncomfortable, are the places that are best for them as well.

There are plenty of voices that will offer you the things that will make you feel good, or that are simple, or that claim to make life easy,

- but these are often spoken, not for your benefit, but rather for the benefit of the speaker.
 - Those who listen to these other voices miss out on the full and meaningful life that GOD has to offer.

3. The thorny soil represents a distracted mind.

- These are Christians who receive the Word of GOD with enthusiasm.
 - But when challenges come, they begin to look to their own strength to deal with the situations and fall away from the principles offered in GOD'S Word.
 - This includes those who think that Christians will never have any problems—that their relationship with GOD will protect them from troubles and that their lives will be filled with wonderful blessings from GOD.

- Often, they believe those blessings will be material and worldly.
- They simply are able to see or understand that growth from GOD doesn't happen apart from life's challenges.
 - It is in the midst of struggles that GOD goes with us to support us, direct us, and encourage us in ways that lead to deeper faith, tangible growth, and stronger commitment.

For example, from time to time, some will ask me to pray that they might have greater patience.

- Before I agree to do that, I caution them that the result will like be an increase in frustrating situations that give them the opportunity to develop patience.
 - While we might like to believe that GOD will just zap us with whatever we need, the reality is that it is in the midst of life's tests that real growth happens.
- Those who aren't prepared for this will become disappointed in GOD when hard times come and distracted by the challenges they are facing,
 - and rather than drawing on GOD'S strength, will simply allow GOD'S word to be choked off.

4. The good soil represents a focused and committed mind.

- These folks place their trust in GOD and not in themselves or others,
 - and as a result, are open to hearing all of GOD'S possibilities.
- They are willing to take on those practices that will cause the Word of GOD to grow in their lives.
- And they do not fear how the Word of GOD might change them and the world around them.
 - Rather, they are open to being the ones through whom the Kingdom might come, to themselves and to others.

But there is one question that we need to consider with regard to this parable:

- Who are we in the story?

We've spent quite a bit of time talking about the soil and, indeed, we are the soil into which the seed of GOD'S Word is sown

- But we also need to recognize that we are also sowers, called and sent to sow GOD'S Word throughout the world.

As soil, we need to consider what kind of soil we are and want to be.

- How will we receive the seed?
- How will we make sure our lives are fertile places for the soil to grow?
- How might we make the word multiply in our lives so that there is more and more seed ready to be sown in the world?

And as sowers, we need to recognize that we are sent from this place to spread the good seed wherever we go.

- By sharing the message of GOD'S love through prayer, through conversation, and through actions, we plant the seeds of GOD'S unconditional love and grace.
 - But as we go, we also need to recognize that there are different types of soil out there.
 - We can't control whether the seed will take root and produce a crop, or simply be chocked off or carried away.
 - It doesn't matter. We are called just to sow.
- And there are those occasional surprises as well.

Years ago, our family planted a small garden in the back yard.

- As the seeds began to grow and crop came up, there was something unexpected that grew— asparagus.
 - We had not planted asparagus and certainly did not expect it to come up.
 - Perhaps it got mixed in with what we planted.
 - Perhaps it had previously been grown in that area.
 - In any case, we produced a crop we didn't even expect.

We are called to be good soil.

And we are called to be sowers who scatter the seeds.

- We can only do this well if we make the commitment to trust GOD and follow GOD'S leading.
- We may be surprised by what grows up, and when, and where.
 - But we also need to know and to trust that by striving to so GOD'S seed, we might bring in wonderful crop: thirty, sixty, or even a hundred-fold.