

“A Dirty Story for Seedy People”
Sermon for May 15, 2016, 8:30 a.m.
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When I was a little girl I dreamed about becoming a mother, a nurse, a ballerina, and a teacher. Becoming a farmer never crossed my mind. Not ever. But here I am, mostly grown up, thinking that I want to be the best darned farmer there ever was. However, I do not mean this in the literal sense. While I appreciate the fruits of the labor of real-life farmers, I don't see myself out plowing the fields anytime soon. I do hope to plant lots of seeds in very good soil. That is, I hope to plant seeds of faith in or children and youth that will grow beyond our wildest dreams. Let's take a look at our scripture reading that has served as inspiration.

To summarize the scripture story: the sower/farmer scatters the seed generously and it ends up on four different types of soil. Some land on the side of the road, some on rocks, others in thorny soil, and some in good soil. The first three groups of seed die and the seed planted in the good soil flourishes.

We good Christians immediately say, “I want to be the good soil.” Or we say, “I know some people who are like the rocky soil,” and, “Let's pray for the folks who are stuck in the thorny soil.” And we go on our merry way,

I love the imagery in this story as it relates to faith formation and spiritual growth. But I have to admit that the more I study this parable, the more I “dig deeper” ~ get it? ~ I question and begin to understand possible layers of meaning. Are we the sower or the seed? Is God the only sower and we are the soil? Is the sower the Holy Spirit and the Gospel is the seed? Are

our kids the soil and we plant seeds in them? I think all of these are relevant and all of these go beyond a simplistic moral of “be the good soil.”

Let’s look at the different components:

The Sower

If we reread the parable from the perspective of the sower, we get a better understanding of why Jesus called it the parable of the sower, not the parable of the soil.

The sower is the one who sows the seed, the one who plants the Word of God. There is nothing here to indicate that it's talking about a full-time preacher or teacher of God's Word. This can be anyone who speaks God's Word. Every time you speak the Word of God, whether you're in a pulpit or in a coffee shop with a friend, you're sowing God's Word and this parable and its' principles applies. Hoorah ~ we can all be farmers!

I want to share an example of a 2nd grader who taught me that we can be each of the components of this parable no matter our age. This friend came to class determined to figure out how to use the Bible to look up our scripture passage each week. With some guidance, and lots of faithful practice, he learned where to find the book of the Bible, which number was the chapter and which were the verses. He then shared the Word with class and tried hard to share the new skill he learned(all of his peers were not quite ready to be farmers or soil or seeds at these moments) My heart overflows with examples like these and makes me want to be a farmer, and good soil, and even the seed that needs tending.

Jesus shares that the sower scattered seed (the Word of God) on all types of ground. It didn't say that he was meticulously planting the seeds in designated 'good soil' areas only ~ it says he was scattering the seed everywhere.

Doesn't that seem wasteful though? I mean, if I were planting a field, why would I throw seed on rocks, thorns, and the side of the road? Wouldn't you want to be careful and put the seed in the good soil from the beginning?

Let's think about this as a parable truly all about the Sower as God. We will be the soil. God knows it is foolish to spread seed on unworthy soil, but he does it anyway. God spreads his love with reckless abandon in hearts that are at once all four different types of soil. He throws seed at the disciples who over and over and over again prove that they are imperfect. Jesus continues to throw seed at them, continues to work with them, and continues to help them see what God is up to in the world around them. He scatters the seed of the Gospel with such energetic generosity, and even when it is clear that his disciples just don't get it, when they turn him over to the authorities, abandon him in his hour of need, and deny even knowing him; Jesus continues to pour out his love on them by inviting them to back into the fold after the resurrection.

God is downright foolish in his love for you and me as well ~ we who continue in the imperfect tradition of the disciples. We who show again and again why we need forgiveness and we forget again and again to give it. The good news is: God continues to throw seed at us. He pours out his love upon us relentlessly. And when he finds even the smallest patch of good soil in our hearts, he nurtures His word within us, producing an abundant harvest: 30, 60, even 100 fold.

The Soils

We can't ignore the soil types completely, but it was important that we first recognize the message of the generous sower. The best part about Jesus' examples of the soil types is that a lot of us will experience a few of them in our own lives.

“Some fell along the path” ~ The Hard Soil

The "wayside" refers to the narrow footpaths that ran beside and through the fields. These were the roads of the day and the soil on them had become as hard as concrete from the feet of the travelers that had walked upon them. When the seed fell on the footpath, it could not penetrate the soil and it remained there in the open, only to be devoured by the birds. This is the 'in one ear, out the other' crowd. If we don't take God's Word seriously, that's the soil we're representing.

‘Some fell on rock’

When the heat comes, just like the sun on a hot day, the small seedling that shot up on the rock will wither and die for lack of soil and water. These people know the Word of God, but when they're tested, they collapse. They have no root. They're not planted deep enough in the soil, so God's Word hasn't truly become their foundation.

‘Other seed fell among thorns’

This soil looks like it is ready to be sown also, but underneath the surface are the living roots and seeds of thorns and weeds. When the seed falls here, it also quickly springs to life and gives every indication that a good harvest will follow. However, the same ground begins to produce the thorns and weeds that were already there and they soon choke out the tender plant. This plant withers and dies without producing any fruit at all.

Often these people hear the word, but do nothing with it. They talk the talk but don't walk the walk, Oh yeah, been there, done that!

'Still other seed fell on good soil'

. . . and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown. . .

The good ground was deep and clean and soft; the seed could take root and could find nourishment; It could grow unchecked; and in this good ground it brought forth an abundant harvest.

And this reminds us that there are times when we are like the good ground, prepared to hear, never too proud or busy to listen and to take action.

I would like to remind us that, all of these soils were from the same field, In other words, Jesus was saying that this does not necessarily represent four different types of people but four different responses in the same person. And when you think about it, all of us have times in our lives when our hear represent each of these responses to God's word. Something to consider ~ which soil are you right now?

The Seed

This parable is told in Matthew, Mark and Luke; each gospel giving us slightly different information. In Matthew, Jesus says that the seed is "the word of the kingdom"; in Mark, it's just simply "the word"; in Luke, it's "the Word of God". But each time it's clear that the seed is the going forth of God's Word. And although God's Word is powerful, it's just in seed form. It's not fully developed; it's just a seed. But it contains within it all the *potential* of new life and fruitfulness

Every seed that was sown by the sower had the potential to produce much more seed. Those of you who farm have seen this principle in action. You can plant one bean seed and from that seed reap many beans, with each pod containing several more seeds. Such is the seed of the Gospel of grace. When it is sown in a ready heart, it will germinate and reproduce itself over and over again. The seed has the potential to begin small and to reproduce much.

It seems like a no brainer for me that as farmers/teachers, we nourish our seeds/learners. These seeds of faith are full of potential for growth for many generations to come. (Sometimes we even plant the seeds and don't witness the "growth" firsthand; in our hope and faith, we know it is happening.)

Jesus ended the parable with, 'he who has ears to hear, let him hear.' Jesus was challenging His disciples (and us) to think about the meaning of the parable, Let us consider this 'dirty story for seedy people.' And I mean this as a high complement and challenge to each of us ~ to be the good fertile soil ready to receive seeds, offer nourishment to those seeds and to be the seeds of God's word and deeds. May we all plant seeds in all kinds of soil, like Jesus, full of love and hope that they will grow. May we be the nurturing farmer, who seeks to grow the seeds of faith everywhere we go. Amen.