

Proper 10, Year A, Pentecost 6  
July 12, 2020  
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC

Genesis 25:19-34  
Psalm 119:105-112  
Romans 8:1-11  
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Welcome to Opening Day! This is Opening Day, not of baseball season, or football season, or Nascar, or ... what have you ... this is opening day of: ... Parable Season! Over the next few weeks, we will learn from Jesus in the form of stories that we call parables. A parable is ... at least ... a little story. It often tells us about ourselves.

In today's parable of the Sower,

The seed on the path, by the wayside, is mostly eaten by birds. That on the rocky ground grows, but too quickly, and is scorched. The seed sown among thorns is choked by those weeds. It is only the good soil in which the seed grows and multiplies so very well.

We often hear this parable and compare our personal faith to the seeds that are sown. Are we on the path, ready to be trampled or carried away? Maybe we are shallow in faith, quick growing and without the deep grounding that we need. We seek have our faith grow in good, rich soil, giving ourselves the literal grounding that we need to grow in Christ. Many of us are somewhere in between; perhaps we consider our faith to be growing but still very vulnerable to the scorching sun of opposition or to opposition so strong that it chokes our faith to death. At this point, the parable of the sower is all about ... me. Us, and our failings.

Theologian Debbie Thomas continues our usual response:

Or else — also like me — you've read this parable and walked away, feeling bad about your own faith life. Feeling judged. Feeling inadequate. Feeling anxious. You've wondered how to make your spiritual soil less hard, less rocky, less thorny. You've designed all sorts of self-improvement projects

to fix what's "wrong" with you. More prayer. Less Twitter. More Bible study. Less cynicism. More church. Less television. You've read the parable as an indictment of your relationship with a Sower who just can't seem to find an appropriately hospitable environment in your messed up heart.

When we read the parable in this way, we miss the richness of "the parable of the Sower." This is not "the parable of the Dirt." A parable, **more** than showing us something about ourselves teaches us about **God, and about the nature and character of God**. The sower is God, or Jesus, and this sower does not carefully plant the seeds in rows. You know those rows: there is a marker made of a popsicle stick and the packet of seeds on one end, a string that hovers over a little furrow while we plant the seeds in a neat little row. The plantings look so ... orderly.

That is not what is happening in this parable. This sower threw the seeds with abandon; not into neat little rows. The seeds were thrown everywhere. Imagine the handfuls of seeds falling through his fingers, landing in dirt, clay, alleys, doorways, playgrounds, and in our hearts. **THIS** is the parable. The sower throws the Good News of Jesus Christ everywhere, opening his hand and spilling out love. There is not only "enough," but more than the sower can spread; the seeds, in fact, never stop falling, never stop landing everywhere – on all of God's creation. God's field **IS** everywhere: inside, outside, on water, land, and in the air. God's love is flung everywhere, in absurd generosity. The seeds on the path – serve as food to those who pass by. The rest? **ALL GROW**. Every seed feeds or grows the Good News of Jesus Christ, that the love of God is so everlasting, so massive, that it can be thrown in joy and hope all over creation.

Back to Debie Thomas:

As I imagine this profligate sower walking in and around and through the varied terrains of our lives, I can't help but wonder about my own contrasting stinginess. The truth is, I don't tend to believe that there's enough Good News to go around. I don't begin with the generous assumption that every kind of soil can benefit from the seed. I don't have confidence that God's Word will go out from God's mouth and accomplish

what God purposes for it, no matter where it lands. I don't trust in God's endless ability to soften hard ground, clear away rocks, and cut through the most stubborn of thorns to make way for a harvest. I don't care about the birds as much as God does.

In short, I forget that all the terrain — *all the terrain* — is finally God's, under God's provision and sustained by God's love. Who am I to tell God, the Creator of the earth and all that is in it, what "good soil" looks like? Who am I to decide who is worthy and who is not of the sower's generosity? Who am I to hoard what I have been so freely and lavishly given? Who am I to look at God's profligate blessing and call it waste?

We all fall short in our ability to believe the generosity of God. How often we worry about money and restrictions and "if only we had more!" What if we are the people who open our arms in appalling generosity, throwing seeds of love, mercy, justice, humility, and truth so far and so often that every downtrodden soul in Greenville would know about God's abundance? What if ... we are that church — and maybe we are — who believes in Jesus in thought, word, and deed, acting in carefree generosity. The world needs to know this generous God. Go ahead — throw the seeds! Throw the seeds of faith in God and in Jesus the Christ — and something will happen. Moreover, that something will grow greatly in measure: thirty, sixty, one-hundred fold.

In this time of illness, perceived scarcity, anxiety, and loss, believe what Jesus is teaching us. Wherever we are: on a hard path, in a rocky place, choked by the failings of outside world, or in healthy, growing ground the grace and love of God reaches us; we are never outside of its path.

As in the parable, it is harvest time. We need one another. We need the love of Christ — and we have it every day. We are called to help the world see the fruits of that love. Go ahead — throw the Good News of Jesus Christ around you, with abandon. Allow this parable not to inform your life, but to BE your life; a life in which the neat rows rarely happen. The path is hard, rocky, full of weeds ... and all of it bears fruit in the name of Jesus. Spread that word, that seed, to a world starving for good news. Fling it with joy that comes from the deep knowledge that

the sower is always with us, not only planting, but tending, nurturing, encouraging and feeding us.

Share the harvest, and the good news of the one who sows unending generosity.  
Amen!