

## *Trust that God's Spirit is at work*

*Psalm 65; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23*

The seeds of the Good News of Jesus Christ are sown each week when we worship, and we have no idea where these seeds will take root. The mystery of what will take and what will grow is not something we control. The divine mystery will however yield a great harvest. We don't know what it will look like we cannot predict the size of the yield, but what we can trust is that the spirit is truly at work even though we may not see it. Sometimes our encounter with the spirit is surprising and fleeting all at the same time. Sometimes the spirit helps us look at something a little bit differently and there is a subtle change in how we move and are in this world. Other times the spirit infuses us with something that takes root, but there are forces outside of our control that seemingly take it away or choke it. And then when the time is right when the barriers are down and our heart is open the spirit fills us with such good news that we grow spiritually speaking we yield to the spirit at work in our lives and in every being at every part of this world and we join in yielding much fruit which we are then invited to share with others.

Now it would be really easy today to try and decide which type of soil are you most like and for some of us if we did that we would end up feeling a sense of defeat or discouragement because maybe we feel we're like that hardened ground or maybe the rocky ground where the seed takes root and then poof it's gone as the sun comes out and scorches it. Maybe we would feel discouraged because we feel that we are not open to receiving the wisdom that the creator has for us this day maybe because we're just not in the right frame of mind maybe we just don't have the energy or maybe something's happened to harden our hearts maybe we do feel like that hardened ground where a bird comes and takes the seed away almost immediately. We might begin to believe that there is always and always will be hope; hope, not in that way of faith that is the way of the spirit. Let me try and rephrase that for you. We might begin to believe that there is no hope, no hope for us, but that is untrue. The spirit believes and works in mysterious ways. We need to look at this wisdom that's found in the parable today and see the parable as spoken words of wisdom for our entire faith journey where the seeds of good news may not always take root but are still at work. And some of them do take root.

One theologian named Gary invites us to consider the following; "why does the Gospel find hospitable space to grow among some people, but not among others. The flip side of the question

is, what are the necessary conditions for fruitful discipleship?"<sup>1</sup> I think it's extremely easy to get caught up in trying to be good soil as opposed to bad soil when really what this parable is suggesting is a test of readiness; not good or bad. Are you, are we as a faith community ready to receive the seeds of good news and how ready are we? If we return to the image of sowing seeds and what makes soil yield the greatest harvest, it's not the type that is hard packed. It's the type of soil that's moist that has an abundance of nutrients just waiting to nourish that seed. It has balance it has room and space for what the seed needs to yield fruit in the end. We also need to remember that each seed has its purpose. Some seeds are short lived, some are taken too soon, some are not given enough space to grow; the good news for us in this parable is that the seeds are sown abundantly constantly and freely.

I kind of equate it to a brainstorming session. For true brainstorm to be effective all people who are gathered to do the brainstorm must throw out all of their ideas to freely sow their ideas wherever they go without casting judgement on whether someone else's idea is good or not. As the ideas are thrown out and captured, usually on a nice white piece of flipchart paper or maybe a whiteboard, we notice that some of the seeds take root. Ideas begin to build on other ideas and then we keep adding more and more wisdom to create something amazing, something that has strong roots and energy to move forward. Some of the other ideas are fleeting and some are just not quite ready yet; maybe they need more time and space to grow.

The practice of discernment, the practice of Sabbath is about listening to where the spirit is taking root in the people. What seeds of good news are ready to be shared in this world? The practice of discernment requires that we trust in the spirit of the collected group; that we trust in the wisdom of the collective faith community. We need to remember that sometimes our ideas and dreams may not take root at this time and that doesn't mean that they were wrong or devalued. They've all led to the seeds that have landed in soil that is ready and open. The seeds of good news are plenty. If we consider ourselves in the role of a sower, I wonder what seeds we individually and collectively as a faith community are sown today. Last Sunday we heard about seeds of hope. What about seeds of courage? Are we sowing seeds of righteousness, honesty, forgiveness? Are we sowing seeds of blessings and healing and belonging? Are we sowing seeds of justice, compassion, and love?

As always there was a song stuck in my head from the 80s of course. Tears for Fears started filling my head last night as I was trying to fall asleep and it was the soundtrack of my dreams last night. It's called 'Sowing the Seeds of Love', and so I wanted to share just a little excerpt from it. It says,

*"sowing the seeds of love, the seeds of love, sowing the seeds, the birds and the bees, my girlfriend and me in love, feel the pain, talk about it if you're a wanted man, then shout about it, open hearts feel about it, open minds think about it, everyone read about it, everyone scream*

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Peluso-Verdend, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 3, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2011), p. 236.

*about it, sowing the seeds of love,”* and then later it says, *“time to eat all your words, swallow your pride, open your eyes, sowing the seeds of love, seeds of love, sowing the seeds.”* It repeats that line repeatedly and I think that that's what this parable is about. That we need to continually sow the seeds of love and compassion in this world. Regardless of whether they always take root or not if we sow seeds and hope that it will land in the perfect spot every single time, we would be missing opportunities that we know nothing about. “This parable was written in a time when it was hard to be Christian due to both poverty and persecution...With this parable Jesus reminds his followers and Matthew reminds his community - that rejection of Jesus’ message does not mean the message is wrong or their efforts are folly; it is simply a fact of life”<sup>2</sup>

Whether in farming or in faith this parable has been an important teaching in my ministry over the past few decades. Having started in youth ministry I started to see the ministry that I was doing in the teachings and all of that was just like tossing out seeds all over the place and having no idea where they land often not seeing if any of them take root. One of the joys of being in long-term ministry and watching youth grow into adults and find careers and have children is that you do sometimes, every once in awhile, get to see a seed that you thought had landed on parched ground, on that rocky ground, in that thorny ground actually landed in soil that was ready and people were changed.

I remember in my first year of youth ministry out at a camp I was taking care of 24 teenagers for the summer. That was a great time, an exciting, very different all sorts of things happened, I got no sleep, but it was the most powerful time. Partly because I got to really see the growth in youth, to see how God's spirit moved within them and change them. There was one youth who caused me no end of heart ache, trouble; it was just one of those youth you know as I'm sure many of you will understand. One of those youth that really challenges your patience your, your sense of purpose, makes you think like why am I doing this? What was really cool is that it was probably 15 years later that I got a message from this particular youth who was now working in a third world country seeking justice for other people; sharing what they had learned with other people and as I saw what this this youth had become and the work that they were doing I saw that the seeds that God had sown through the ministry that we had done together had taken root and were fruitful people, were benefiting from what this youth had struggled through for so long and that youth’s heart had been opened in a way I never thought possible. In that moment I hoped, I believed, I trusted, I really did trust. Every once in while I still doubt it, but I still trust it in my heart of hearts that something good would come out of this.

During this time of Covid I got the opportunity to reconnect with some of the past youth. I sent out a video saying hey I'd love to hear some of your crazy stories from back in the day. And one of the youths reached out and told me that if it hadn't been for youth group they would have died. Youth group was what saved their life because they had found a place where they were accepted, and they belonged. We never have any idea how these seeds of hope and love can take root,

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<sup>2</sup> Talitha J. Arnold, *Feasting on the Word*, p. 238.

when they will grow. We have no idea and the reality is in our faith journey we're going to repeat. There's going to be times where teachings or thoughts fall on a hardened ground because we're just not ready to deal with it yet and there's going to be times where we forget to make space in our lives for God, to be at work and those thorns are going to come and choke out that good news that we are called to share in the world.

As we continue in this time apart from one another I want you to consider what seeds has Covid planted, this time in Covid. What seeds has God planted in this time? How will we see certain things change? What habits new habits ended up in the really fertile ground that are going to change how we interact with each other or how we live our lives day-to-day? What seeds you know were fleeting that you know we really wanted to change and then kind of disappeared? Maybe the next time it's thrown out it's going to take root. We are called to sow seeds abundantly, recklessly even trusting that God's spirit will move where it needs to move. Maybe it'll inspire somebody for a moment, maybe it will give them something to hold on to until we can meet again and maybe just maybe it can change the lives of people in this world. Maybe finally justice will be served. I hope and pray in this time that you work towards creating soil that is ready. That's what the practice of Sabbath is about, that is what the practice of prayer is about is creating soil that is open so that your heart is open to hearing the words of Christ and the words of God moving in your spirit. And then when they grow, and you are full and fruitful and have yielded so much that you share it with openness and abundance with every other person. So, I hope you go out into this world and so the seeds of love. Amen.