

## Sowing Seeds of a New World

The parable of the sower is the first parable in the first Gospel, Matthew's gospel.

In a sense, the parable of the sower is a parable about parables.

That's because in the coming weeks we will hear many parables by Jesus and today's parable kind of introduces us to the roller coaster ride Jesus intends to take us on.

In the coming weeks we'll hear Jesus talking about mustard seeds and yeast, of treasures hidden in fields and pearls of great value, of great hauls of fish, and Jesus uses every one of these parables to at times nudge us, at other times scandalize us, at other times shock us, into catching a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.

Depending on where you are for each of these parables in your own life, depending if you're feeling "with it" or in a funk, depending where I am as your far too feeble mediator in trying to interpret these strange stories, well, some of these parables may go nowhere for us, as if they fell on a pile of rocks, while others may give us the briefest insight into what is Really Real, until I start freaking about where the mortgage payments coming from, or you start worrying about what to make for dessert for those uppity relatives coming for a visit; but maybe, if we are lucky, there may come a parable that takes root in the good topsoil of your imagination and, in the taking root, changes everything you thought you knew.

Probably I told you about my first day in homiletics class in the seminary, back when I knew nothing of the gospels; that day when I said, during my first sermon ever, that the parables are lovely sweet stories intended to convey a simple message; and how, in hearing those words come out of my mouth, the professor gasped, grabbed his chest, and nearly gave me an F for saying such a stupid thing.

The fact is, Jesus tells parables not to sooth us, but to blow up our view of how we think things really are.

So today when Jesus takes his seat in that boat on the water's edge, he knows full well that he's addressing a community of people who have come to believe that God is only on their side, who have come to believe that God is looking out for only them; and in the face of that crowd, Jesus starts throwing hand grenades in the form of this story about the sower; this crazy sower who throws seeds of the kingdom everywhere you can possibly imagine, not just on the select few, this sower who is covering every sort of person, every nation, in fact covering the whole wide world with the seeds of the kingdom.

In Jesus, God is taking back his world, and taking back his people, not only the few and the brave, but the whole lot of us.

And listen in on how God sets about accomplishing this task.

It's not with rockets red glare or trumpets in the sky.

Instead, he's taking over in ways that are entirely mysterious, because his ways are nearly invisible, and unless you learn to see and unless you learn to hear, with eyes that are Kingdom eyes, with ears that are Kingdom ears, why, you'll miss it all together.

For example, today, and for the next few weeks, we'll hear Jesus going on and on about seeds, so that, if we listen well and look carefully, we may come to discover that the Kingdom of God is something like a seed.

Seeds are very small, and Jesus loves talking about particularly small seeds, like the mustard seed, seeds that are almost impossible to see, these are seeds that seem to just disappear into the world, and this is what he compares the kingdom to, this is what he compares the Word to, this is what he compares himself to.

How different from what we imagine as God moving in the world...we who are so often looking for fireworks and lightening and earthquakes, how easy for us to miss the tiniest thing that disappears into dirt.

Where it dies.

And yet,

"Think about what this says about Jesus, and how it re-echoes through his whole ministry.

He, as the Word, comes to his own, and his own receive him not.

He is despised.

He is the stone the builders reject.

If we want to find him walking among us, we don't look for a thirty-something bearded Jew, but rather we will find him in the sick, among the imprisoned, standing around the open fire with the down and out.

And to cap his whole career as the Word of God sown in the field of the world, he dies, he rises – and he vanishes.

His entire work looks very much like the work of the seed: it takes place in a mystery, in secret, in a way that can neither be known nor felt, but only believed, only trusted.”

Capon, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 68 (paraphrased).

My daughter loves to comment on my sermons.

The usual response is: “That was a good one dad, but why do you go around and around, why can’t you just get to the point?”

A fair question, if a little cheeky.

And so I tell her about Emily Dickinson who advised:

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant  
[For] The Truth must dazzle gradually  
Or every man be blind.

That is to say, in less poetic language:

“there is no direct understanding of the kingdom: it is a strange thing, and people's minds are dulled.....” Paul Nuechterlein.

Jesus says much the same things when, after explaining the parable of the sower to his inner circle, he quotes the prophet who says:

“Listen and listen but never understand!  
Look and look but never perceive!  
This people’s heart has grown coarse,  
their ears dulled, they have shut their eyes tight  
to avoid using their eyes to see, their ears to hear,  
their heart to understand....” Mt 13:15

And again:

“I will speak to you in parables, I will  
unfold what has been hidden  
since the creation of the world.” Mt 13:35

When we try to get "right to the point" as my soon to be high school freshman daughter would like, when it comes to the mystery of the Kingdom of God, what we get is not insight but rather comic book images of a heavenly place that matters only after we die, where we sit on fluffy white clouds, strumming harps and yawning.

But if we are willing to really lean in on what Jesus is uncovering for us, we may come to see that the Kingdom is not waiting for us after we die; it is right in front of your face and mine, now, today, this very second.

That the mystery that is God is not waiting for our death to greet us face to face, but is even now standing with us, inviting us to join in the great adventure of making God's good creation new.

And there is this.

If I am to unlearn the usual human story filled with divisions and strife, then I need to unlearn looking at myself as good soil and someone else as bad soil.

The truth is, the most basic field into which God sows his grace is my life, where it sometimes meets with hard soil and sometimes with rocky soil and weeds, but sometimes, on a good day, God's grace finds its way onto good soil, soil that bears the fruit of extending God's limitless love to others of all shapes, sizes, colors and languages.

And so it is today that my constant prayer is that my heart and my life, that your hearts and your lives, may they be good soil today, welcoming the seeds of the Kingdom, the seeds that God himself plants with such joyful abandon.

+amen

