

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 introduces us to the roller coaster ride Jesus is about to take us on.

In the coming weeks we'll hear Jesus talk 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, to scandalize us, to shock us, into catching a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.

Depending on where you are for each of these parables, 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, 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 the mortgage payment, 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, change 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 intending 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 something so ridiculous.

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

So today, as 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 crazy sower who scatters seeds of the kingdom everywhere you can possibly imagine, not just on the select few, but on every sort of person, on every nation, 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 he's doing it in ways completely unexpected.

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

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

Today, and for the next few weeks, we'll hear Jesus talking 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 so small they are almost impossible to see, these are seeds that seem to disappear into the world, and this is what he compares the kingdom of God to, this is what he compares the Word of God 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 smallest thing that disappears into dirt.

Where it dies.

And yet,

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

Jesus, the very Word of God, comes to his own people, and his own people 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 find him in the sick, among the imprisoned, standing around the open fire with the down and out.

In the end, as the Word of God sown in the field of the world, he dies, he rises — and he vanishes.

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 can’t you just get to the point?”

A fair question, if a little cheeky.

But the truth is: “there is no direct understanding of the kingdom of God: it is a strange thing, and our minds are dull...” Paul Nuechterlein.

Or as the poet puts it:

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant....

The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind.

Jesus says as much when, after explaining today’s parable 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 straight “to the point” as my daughter would like, when it comes to the mystery of the Kingdom of God, what we get is not the point at all.

Instead, we get comic book images of a far off heaven, a place that matters only after we die, where we sit around on fluffy white clouds, strumming harps and yawning.

But if we are willing to really lean in on what Jesus is inviting us to see, we may come to understand 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.

We may come to see that 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.

When God sows his grace in the field of my life, it often meets with rocks and sometimes with weeds — but once in awhile, God's grace finds its way onto some good soil in my life, soil that bears the fruit of God's pure love of people, people of all shapes and sizes and colors and languages.

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

+amen