

### “Seeds of Love”

The parable of the sower is one of the better known of Jesus’ parables. Perhaps it is because sowing seeds is something even city dwellers are familiar with. After all, nearly all children in kindergarten or elementary school at one time or another have had the project of planting a seed in a little paper cup to watch it sprout and grow. You do not have to live in the country to see lots of plant life. In cities there are parks, sports fields, community gardens and the persistent weeds that grow up in the cracks of the sidewalk. My brother is an urban forester. When I chuckled at hearing that title he showed me an aerial photo of Washington DC. I could hardly see the streets, car and buildings for the canopy of trees. It was quite amazing.

Another reason that this parable may get a lot of attention is because of the explanation included in the text. While we like having his parables explained, Jesus seldom does so in the Gospels. Only in the Gospel of Luke do we get this kind of explanation more than once. Luke seemed to like to explain the parables in a simplistic or allegorical ways. Mathew seems to be copying Luke here. The problem is that the explanation we are offered overlooks the most important aspect of the parable. There is nothing surprising about seeds that whither in rocky soil, or seeds getting eaten by birds, or seeds choked out by weeds. What is surprising is a farmer spreading seeds in such a profligate way.

In ancient Palestine farming was a life or death proposition. One did not plant a garden for fun, or in order to marvel at how the seeds sprouted and grew. One planted for food in order to sustain life. They lived hand to mouth. The sweat of their brow and the work of their hands kept them alive.

In order to plant certain crops, the farmer walked the tilled land broadcasting seed by hand. The farmer would simply fling seed on the plowed earth as evenly as possible so that no seed was wasted. Seed was not available from Burpee or Southern States. Seed was saved from the previous harvest. In the case of wheat, it was the seed head that did not get ground for flour. Seed was precious, because seed became food. If the seed was wasted by tossing it on compacted soil, there went a loaf of bread. If seed was wasted on rocky ground, there was a mouth that went hungry in winter. If seed was wasted on the birds, there was a belly that ached through the night unfed.

The Parable of the Sower tells us how God is like a farmer sowing a field of grain. Yet unlike the farmer God flings the seed of love and compassion everywhere. God is prodigal in how that seed is distributed. It falls on good soil, on the hard compacted soil of the path, on rocky ground, and in with the briars. The word of God catches hold in different ways among different types of people—shallow, fertile, stubborn, resistant, hopeful, negligent. The difference between the farmer’s seed and God’s seed is that while both are extremely precious, the farmer’s seed is limited. God’s seed, the gift of love, is limitless.

The farmer chooses and prepares a specific plot of land for planting. The farmer selects land that will produce abundantly. The farmer tills the soil, pulls out the rocks, stumps, and weeds in order to give his precious seed the best chance to produce. Undoubtedly God seeks to prepare you and me to receive the precious teachings and commandments, but God does not limit the distribution of love just to those who are best prepared and most worthy. God showers love on everyone like it was worthless. God, who as scripture tells us, is love, cannot help but send love out everywhere. God wants it to catch and take hold. God knows that each of our souls has rocky, thorny and weedy places as well as fertile places. God wants to give every one of us the love we need and deserve because we are all God's children.

It is up to each of us to make a place for the seed of God's love to flourish. We can till the soil in preparation for receiving the seed of love or ignore the fields of our hearts and let God's love and grace go to waste. We can receive God's love and nourish it like the farmer or we can let it fall for the birds to eat. We can tend that love like the diligent gardener or let the briars and weeds of worldly cares and distractions take over and choke it out.

Until the soil is tilled, fortified with compost and seeds planted the earth sits fallow waiting to be transformed. Until the weeds are pulled, the plants fertilized and watered the seeds might sprout but could be choked out by other unproductive growth. God's love is here ready to germinate like so many seeds and to flourish like so many gardens and lawns. But it needs us to tend a place in our hearts to receive and allow it to grow. Not just in the enthusiasm of the moment, because, like these gardens and lawns, it takes constant care to take hold and flourish. Otherwise, it turns brown from lack of water, the weeds choke out the flowers and vegetables, and the gardens of our hearts return to place of hardness, resentment, and darkness.

The parable is not so much about where the seed lands as the fact that the seed is spread on each one of us even if we are not worthy to receive it. The question is not what kind of ground we are, but what kind of ground we want to be. It is our choice. It just takes a bit of care and God's love will grow within us into something lush, beautiful and transformative. God's love is transformative but we have to accept as such. We, like the fallow land, have to be eager and waiting for transformation. The transformation to the true and wonderful you that the world needs now more than ever.