

Parable of the Sower, July 10, 2018
6th Sunday after Pentecost
Christ Church
Gabriola, Island
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INTRODUCTION

The focus today will be on the parable we just heard: Gospel of Mathew 13 *The Parable of the Sower*. Being a parable, it opens the door to many interpretations and therefore the story often lingers later to be re-membered and decoded in more detail.

Parables are great *teaching devices* we all know, and especially those formal teachers or instructors among us, or parents and grandparents who are still trying their best to get a message across to a younger generation—ANY younger generation!

Some gospel writers have Jesus translate the meaning of the parable to his intimate followers (disciples) but that is disputable and current thinking is that the writers of the gospels added this for their audiences who were struggling in times of vulnerability in early Church communities .

Let that not dissuade us from seeing just where we might fit into this parable, even though it is one that we have heard many times. Just to give you a heads up from my perspective. I have been inspired by many people in my life, here there and everywhere by those who took this parable very seriously I believe.

I studied with Verna Dozier while doing my seminary work part time in the 1980's at the Episcopal Divinity School(EDS) in Cambridge, MA. One summer she taught a week long intensive. She wrote several books and among them was one titled: *The Dream of God*. She wrote: *We are called to stand by people in their pool of tears and question the systems that make them cry*. Verna was a sower, a seed and certainly had good ground to stand on!

Jonathan Daniels, a seminary student (in his third year) from that same place School (EDS) was so moved by the Civil Rights movement that he went south to

Selma . He stepped out in front of Ruby Sales a young black woman and took the shot gun bullets meant for her by a white supremacist. Martin Luther King called this death brutal and bestial but said that Jonathan had “performed one of the most heroic Christian deeds which I have heard in my entire ministry.” Jonathan believed in taking his faith in God’s love and justice to the segregated south and therefore there are risks to this kind of love and reception of the Word made flesh.

So make no mistake, when Jesus tells a story, no matter how seemingly easy or “other directed” it may seem—other directed from you and me—there is more to them than meets the eye and indeed we are called to listen deeply and apply it to ourselves...not just the for the farmer who plants, nor the shepherd who cares for his sheep, nor the samaritan who sacrifices his life, nor the king holding a wedding feast and so forth.

PART 1

So lets explore this parable together and see what we might see in it, that relates to our experiences or those we have observed in others—for good or not!

If we were theatre folks doing a scene, we would first ask— what happened before this Matthew 13. What reactions did the Pharisees and scribes have to Jesus ministry and those crowds he was attracting? Anyone want to share?

Well, last week in Chapter 12, we realized that not everyone was pleased with this new “prophet” and we can see some beginnings of a plot. And Jesus was also sharing his awareness that not everyone was “getting” his message.

So as today’s gospel begins he steps outside a house and begins to sit down by the shore of the sea but a large crowd gathers so he moves on to a small boat a and sits down and begins to talk with those gathered on the shore.

The term CROWD might tell us something. Why would Jesus not just stay there on the shore and talk with them?

What does CROWD mean? (to be pressed close, people without order are often called crowds and sometimes easily lead (results of the lost Stanley cup in Vancouver with Canucks)to riots. But, it can also be a group of people having something in common— “Us” a community or congregation gathering together.. Maybe, just maybe by having some distance between himself and the CROWD he could see them and more effectively deliver his message.

What is the advantage for you and to BE together at least once week??
—sometimes before the service, during the service, after the service—what do we receive or give to these community or congregational gatherings ? Is it support, reinforcement (the whole island is NOT Christian), inspiration, information

Part 2 :THE STORY

A farmer goes out and sowers seeds everywhere, some on good ground and some not so good.

What is the seed? Or what is the message in the seed? Any ideas, remember it is Jesus talking here, what do you think his over riding and repeated message is?

The kin-dom of God is for everyone and it is now today and always: God loves what God has created and seeks to have creation (humans at this point) honour creation and one another with the love he has given them. This is what Bonhoeffer calls costly grace an unearned gift that calls us to act responsibly and be there *for others NON JUDGEMENTALLY...*

Who is the sower? Could be Jesus? Certainly he was about doing all those things of sharing God's love in word and deed. Could it be you? Could it be me?

Jesus we know, was about helping individuals become whole in body mind and soul and to know they were loved but he was creating a way for this work to go on and on. He was in someways creating a movement, we might call it the *Jesus Movement* and this needs disciples and followers.

If so? how do we share this message? How have others?
(No we are not evangelicals who stand on street corners, knock on doors, except to raise money for heart fund or sell Girl guide Cookies..

Story: Methodist minister in 2008 had to give his congregation some shocking news: the national church had added to its commitment all Methodists were to make: *Are you willing to faithfully participate in the ministries of the United Methodist church by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service NOW THEY HAD TO ACCEPT..and your witness!*

Or my favourite story, which many have heard: In the early days of Europeans coming to the “New World” Baptists were the first to go to share the gospel: they went out on horse back with a Bible in their saddle bags, as soon as trails were made the Congregationalists went out on buckboard to spread the Christian gospel; the Presbyterians waited for the train tracks to be laid and then went out and the Anglicans waited for the Club car to be added.

How does the word in the seed best take root—Jesus is trying to help people see that their acceptance of God’s love needs to mean something in their lives—in their **lived lives** in community....

This leads us to the kinds of soil the seeds fall into, doesn’t it?

You see if we “get the message” but do nothing with it, by that I mean in our lives and how we live, we might ask ourselves if that message of grace, the love of God is it really in us, have we really recognized it? Do we believe we EACH of us is the apple of God’s eye?? worm holes and all??

How do we know? Let us not get ourselves into a standard of Mother Teresa, or Desmond Tutu, Dalai Lama, Jean Vanier...or Stephen, Peter, Paul, Mary or Martha etc. What about you and me, mere mortals? How do we know when we are really keeping our soil good/ our receptors open, let alone anyone else?

Part 3: What about us?

Every year many of you faithfully take care of the soil for your plants...what do you do?...don’t answer just think about the time some of us spend taking care of soil...dirt...for what reason?? Maybe, just maybe you and I need to check the soil in our lives and see how receptive it is to the messages of God’s love for ALL!

—our ground can get a little rocky: sometimes I think I get it really fast, but then I remember cramming for a test and as soon as you took it...you forgot most of what you had “learned. Taking time—what is stopping me from listening to the stories of indigenous people, from neighbours, friends and relatives who have really some important things to share,

—what are the thorns in our lives that distract us, or choke us— paying more attention to secondary things—trying to be everything to everyone except God?

trying to get more things—mopping around because we are getting older (not our Molly)

— what is happening near by in downtown Nanaimo or any cities' down town's east side....I am no Sargent Shriver (headed the Peace core) but maybe a Tlralong of Abraham faiths locally could be considered (Christians, Jews, Muslims)....how to reduce conflict and listen to those who are “different” from me.

Just maybe supporting the people like the Lions, Commons, Meals on Wheels, or our own churches outreach as a primary, not secondary concern;

We often thank our lucky stars don't we, that we live here on Paradise Island Maybe we need to be more thankful to the creator and maybe we are being called to extend this gratitude to the Divine and consider those with whom we share this beautiful space and who live here but do not see this as a blessing for so many reasons:

Well if is wonderful to preach to the choir but we all know that once in a while even thee and me hits an “off note...and hopefully this reflection reminds us that we have this “ministry”..together as a gift given to us...and our ground is good and together we can make it even better!

Let me offer a prayer that comes from Corrymeela's collaboration for new liturgies:

Crowded God

I See people all around you

Some are shallow, they won't stay long

Some are worried, and can't let their concerns go

What place can I have in your kingdom?

If I Find stillness, can I hear and understand

Even through the crowd?

Hear my one voice among many—

May my faith grow in my heart

One willing, seeking heart, ready

to listen and understand.

AMEN

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References:

Verna J. Dozier, *The Dream of God*, Cowley Publications, 1991.
The Washington Post, Sunday, September 6, 2006.
www.spiritualityofconflict.com