

The soil, the seed, the sower! Mark 4.1-20



Again he began to teach beside the lake. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the lake and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the lake on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow.' 4.1-3

I wonder what those crowds gathered by the sea that day thought when they heard Jesus speak. They'd doubtless heard stories about this preacher who was travelling around, performing miracles. Perhaps they'd heard amazing reports about what he had done. People had taken to arguing about him saying there was simply no way those stories could be true. He was more than likely than not, just another upstart. Yet others swore that the stories were true. They'd seen him with their own eyes or at least they knew of people who had seen his miracles. They'd heard him teach and preach. This was the one that the Holy Scriptures had promised would come. You can almost sense the expectation - anticipation? Scripture tells us the crowd was so large that Jesus had to get in a boat and push out into the water so they could all see him.

Then he begins to speak: 'A farmer sows his seed. He throws it everywhere. Some falls on the path and is eaten by birds. Some falls on the rocky ground and grows at first, but it is killed by the hot sun. Some falls in among the weeds and thorns and is choked to death. But some falls on good soil and yields a rich bounty.'

And that is it. That is all he says.

When we read this passage, we get the explanation of the parable, but the crowd there on the seashore that day, they didn't get it. They just got the story. It leaves me wondering - did they go away feeling cheated?

In a way, though, the parable was the perfect illustration of the point Jesus was trying to make. Not everyone who hears the Gospel bears fruit. Some people hear it, but it doesn't get past their ears. It does not touch their heart in any way and it quickly fades away. Some hear and rejoice but when turmoil and trouble enters their lives, the joy fades, the Good News dies. Some hear the word of God, but their hearts are set on wealth or the pleasures of this world, and these things strangle whatever change the Good News might have worked in their lives. And then some people hear the Good News and it bursts forth in their life. They live as new and different people. They bring God's love to the world in what they do and how they live.

Jesus knew that many, maybe most, in that crowd were not ready to hear the Good News of the Gospel. So, he didn't try to explain it to them. He did not go out of his way to make his message understandable. He did not worry that lots of people left the shore that day scratching their heads or angry that they didn't get from Jesus what they had come expecting to get.

Often when we read this parable the first question that springs to mind is: what kind of soil am I? However, I believe an equally crucial element to this parable is the generosity of the sower! Jesus throws his seed everywhere. It is flying about all over the place. He doesn't seem care. The birds are going to eat much of it. The sun is going to kill off a lot of it. The weeds will certainly choke it. But he just keeps throwing it out there.

So what might we learn from this passage? The last twelve months has been a difficult time for everyone. We've all been affected one way or another: physically, mentally, financially or spiritually. What this passage says to me is that Jesus understands our struggles. He understands that some of us will find ourselves in a place where the world's troubles crowd in and try to drown out our joy in God. He understands that some of us will be taken up with worldly concerns. He understands that the weeds of this world will test our faith. He understands that sometimes we can barely hear the words of hope let alone believe them to be true.

But the Good News is this: Jesus will keep throwing his seed our way until we are ready and able to receive it again and he does this in the most unexpected ways and through the most surprising people. God is working in your life and in mine, he's working in the lives of our friends and family and neighbours. He's working to break up the hard soil and make it ready to receive his words of hope and faith and love. We are invited to work with God to sow his seed into the lives of everyone we meet - to sow God's seed everywhere we go. Much of it may never take root. Much of it may never bear fruit. But do not worry. God has an abundant, an extravagant store-house, his seeds of faith will never run out – how liberating is that – to live with the assurance of God's abundant generosity towards us.

Every blessing, Linda

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