

A Generous Harvest

By Timothy L. Owings (with minor editing)

When we think of the parables Jesus told, the parable of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan come quickly to mind. My hunch is the parable of the sower would be third on our list.

Recorded in both Mark and Matthew, this parable is not only one we remember but also one of the few parables to which our Lord gave an interpretation.

As Jesus told the parable, a farmer put a heavy seed bag on his shoulder and went out to his field to sow seed. In those days, farmers broadcast seed across a fallow field before plowing; seed was first sown, and then gently plowed into the ground.

You might find it interesting that this methodology is being reclaimed today by farmers wanting to better care for God's earth. Using refined technology, a farmer can sow and cultivate a corn crop without deep-plowing the field. "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

Here, as this farmer broadcast his precious seed, some fell on a wellworn path cut by foot traffic through the fallow field.

When fields lay fallow, foot travelers would cut walking paths through the fields, taking the shortest distance between two points. Fencing was rarely if ever used in the first century. So some seed landed on the path. And when it did, the birds quickly enjoyed lunch.

Other seeds, said Jesus, fell on rocky ground. Because there was little soil there, the seedlings sprang up quickly and then withered under the scorching sun. Thorns choked off other seeds, denying them the light of day and the promise of their bounty.

Finally, some seed fell on good ground and brought forth a bumper crop yielding thirty, sixty, even a hundredfold. Jesus ended the story admonishing all to listen; listen carefully, deeply, and thoughtfully.

Some time passes. Probably alone with his disciples, Jesus gave an interpretation to this beloved parable that has endured through the ages.

Many believe that our Lord's interpretation of the parable, as representing various kinds of people, is the only legitimate

interpretation. What if, as I believe, this parable has, can have, and even must have many meanings to it?

As with all our Lord's parables, the key is to listen and let the word take root in our lives.

I have another take on this great story; a twist to the text I invite you to consider. What if the parable could be applied with equal power to every individual life, to everyone who listens? If that is so, all of our lives have worn, rocky, thorny, and yes, good soil in which seed can germinate and grow.

What if this parable is about you and me? If so, what is God saying to us?

If your life is like mine, you know how daily living creates well-worn paths. We call them ruts. We drive to and from work using the same route day after day. We shop at the same grocery store, fill our tanks at the same convenience store, attend the same church, and, more times than not, feed our families predictable menus of foods we know they will eat and enjoy.

Routines are often required, but sometimes in our relationship with God, routines can become ruts. We can attend

church week after week, hear the scriptures read (like this familiar parable), sing familiar hymns, go through the church routine, and in so doing, give the good seed God sows us to the birds of indifference.

Truth be told, God's seed also falls on the rocky places of our lives. Life, by definition, can leave us cold, sharp, soilless, and rough. Pain, the cruelty of insensitive friends, and the crude comments of strangers can leave us lifeless and unmoved, rocks void of God's bounty. Thorns pop up in our life's ground as well. None of us intend to succumb to the cutting brutality of thorns, but there they are, choking out God's blessings, robbing us of God's promise.

But thanks be to God, some seed falls on good ground. When it does, the miracle of germination, cultivation, nourishment, sunshine, rain, and care yield a generous harvest no one thought was possible. It happens in all our lives in ways that leave us speechless.

I am thinking today of countless individuals through the years who have started to tell me a story with these words:

“You’ll never believe what happened to me today.” Or, “I had no idea God could take what I did and use it to bless another’s life.”

Tell your story. Look back and see all the times God sowed good seed on the good ground of your soul, and from that small beginning came a generous harvest that still leaves you amazed.

Here is the needed twist in this old, old story. Yes, there will always be people who are worn out, rocky, wasted, and yes, good. But the gospel reminds us there is far more good in all of us in which God’s grace can take root than any of us imagine.

All manner of ground exists in the fields that are our lives. Why don’t we clear out the rocks, cut down the thorns, change up the routines, and give God even more opportunities to grow from our lives the generous, bountiful, giving people God in Christ made us to be?

I invite you to believe it today and to discover it as you do the amazing work of God in and through your life.

Let us pray...

Ancient Gardener,

your holy word is planted in our hearts

as good seed in fertile soil.

So nurture us

that we may bear fruit abundantly,

becoming your healing hands in this troubled world.

We pray this in your loving and hopeful name. Amen.