

Good Seeds Need Good Soil

In this coming Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus tells a parable that is sometimes known as the parable of the sower and the seeds and also known as the parable of the four soils. Parables were often used by Jesus in His teachings. This particular chapter from Matthew's Gospel (Chapter 13) contains seven different parables.

One of my Bible commentaries describes parables, and this passage, in this way: "Parables are short stories that use familiar scenes and everyday objects and relationships to explain spiritual truths. A parable compares something unfamiliar with something familiar. It compels listeners to discover truth, while at the same time concealing the truth from those too lazy or too stubborn to see it. Jesus' insights were hidden from those who refused to seek the truth and from those who would not come back and inquire. To those who were honestly searching, the truth became clear."

In this parable Jesus was trying to explain why some people listened to His teachings and accepted Him, while others who listened to the very same teachings rejected Him. He used the image of a farmer sowing seeds in a field, and how the seed fell on four very different types of soil - hard soil, rocky soil, weed-filled soil, and fertile soil. In this parable, the farmer represents Jesus, the seeds represent His teachings, the soil represents His audience.

Most people living in Galilee during Jesus' lifetime were engaged in farming or fishing, and they would have all been familiar with the image that Jesus was describing. In fact, you don't need to be a farmer to understand this parable. Anyone who has done any type of gardening (and even those who haven't) knows that the condition of the soil determines the health of the plant that grows there.

In this parable, there is nothing wrong with the farmer and the seed. Plants are growing in some areas but not in others, yet it is the same farmer who planted them and he is using the same seed. The problem lies with the poor conditions of some of the soil. In the same way, Jesus is showing that there is nothing wrong with Him or His message. The problem lies with the inability of His audience to understand and/or accept the truth of what He is saying. Just as there were many people who rejected Jesus' message in His day, there are many people today who hear Jesus' message today and yet still do not believe. This parable helps to explain some of the reasons why that might be the case.

The question that this parable is asking us is this: "What kind of soil are you?" Are we like the hardened soil of the path, lacking in understanding or perhaps so closed-minded that Jesus' words reach our ears and then bounce off? Are we like the rocky soil, being superficial in our commitment to Jesus with only a thin layer of faith underneath the surface? Are we like the weed-filled soil, with too many impurities and distractions in our lives competing for our time, attention, and loyalty? Or are we like the fertile soil, with the perfect conditions to receive Jesus' teaching and to allow them to take root and grow and thrive in our lives?

Unlike soil which is passive and inanimate, we have an active role to play in nurturing our faith. We can prepare ourselves to hear, understand, and receive the words of Jesus. By preparing ourselves spiritually through prayer, Bible study, worship, and service, we are helping to create the right conditions. The choice is ours.

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