

Sermon: The Sowers in our lives

Have you ever asked someone a question, and she or he responded by telling you a story? I have a mentor who often does that. I will go to them with something about my life – a question, a struggle, a wondering – and instead of giving me an answer or telling me what to do they tell me a story.

They are giving the work of figuring out my life back to me. I think that is what Jesus is doing in today's gospel.

Jesus is tossing out a story the way the Sower tosses out seeds. The story lands beside our lives as a mirror in which to see ourselves, as a window into our hearts. I do not want us to do anything with today's parable other than give it a chance to do something with us.

I do not want to try and figure it out. I want to let it figure us out and reveal something. I do not want us to interrogate the parable looking for an answer. I want us to listen for the questions it is asking us. I think that is what Jesus is getting at when he says, "Let anyone with ears listen!"

So, I will not offer any interpretations or explanations of today's gospel, and I won't tell you what it means or how it applies to your lives. I do not know. That is your work to do. And I have mine to do. I have no answers, but I have some questions for you and myself, and I think it is enough for us to follow the questions.

"A Sower went out to sow." Who is this Sower? Some say it is Jesus sowing seeds of the gospel. Maybe. Others say it is God and not Jesus. They say Jesus is the Word, the seed, that God is sowing. Maybe. Jesus and God are the usual answers but are the usual answers the only answers? And why can't there be more than one Sower? Might you and I also be Sowers? Aren't we all Sowers? God, Jesus, you, me.

If we are all Sowers, then we are all sowing something. What are you sowing these days? And what do the seeds you and I are sowing say about us, our values, priorities, concerns, and desires?

Seeds are about life. They hold possibility and potential. They get things started. They are a beginning. They carry our hopes. They are the Sower's commitment to the future.

There are all sorts of seeds – seeds of love, friendship, compassion, forgiveness; seeds of vulnerability and intimacy; seeds of hope and change; seeds of success and accomplishment; seeds of truth, healing, and justice; seeds of anger, resentment, discord, and division; seeds of judgment, indifference, fear, hatred. Every feeling, emotion, attitude, and experience we have comes with a packet of seeds and we each must decide if that is really what we want to scatter on the earth, in our families and friendships.

When have you reaped what you sowed? Did you get the harvest you wanted? Was it good for you and others? What effect has your sowing had on another? Where and with whom are you sowing these days? From whom do you withhold your sowing? Are the seeds you are sowing these days enlarging life or diminishing it?

The Sower in today's gospel sows here, there, and everywhere without regard to where the seed might land or the quality or type of ground on which it falls. The Sower sows not because of who or what the ground is but because of who the Sower is. The Sower sows because he or she sows. There is no other because, no end game, for this Sower.

The Sower makes no judgments about the quality or worthiness of the soil and is not attached to the outcome. What do you think of that? Is the Sower generous or reckless? Yes, maybe so. Does the parable make sense? It is certainly a different way of living.

That is probably not how most of us live or what we've been taught. We judge, separate, and divide the different soils of our life. We assign value.

Where is that happening in your life and with whom? When have you sown only with the intent of getting a return on your investment? Is there an end game for you? Are you measuring productivity, making judgments, or keeping score of yourself or another? When and from whom have you withheld seed because you deemed the ground unworthy?

That is not how the Sower into today's parable lives. The Sower makes an offering and then will let go of the outcome.

What would it be like to live and love like that? How would your life be different if you stopped measuring and keeping score? What might start growing or come back to life in you or another if you simply made an offering in this place at this time and let go of the outcome?

It is easy and tempting to categorize ourselves and others as one of the four types of soil in today's parable – hardened, rocky, thorny, and fertile. What if they are not categories of people but aspects and ways of being in each of our lives? What if we all have parts of ourselves that are hardened, rocky, thorny, and fertile?

What if the four soils are descriptive of how we live and relate to God, others, and ourselves? Maybe the four soils are not judgments but diagnoses, information to be considered.

I have known times when it felt like I was living my life on the hard beaten path, going through the motions, getting from here to there. Haven't you? I could not slow down and appreciate life because nothing was growing or flowering. And there have been times when I was hard hearted, hardheaded, or defensive. The hardness snatched away life, the possibility of growth, the deepening of relationships. I wonder if you have ever experienced that.

What is snatching away your life today? What in your life today needs to be tilled, loosened, and softened? What would help you get off the beaten path of life?

Sometimes life can feel rocky. The ground is rough. Our footing is unsure. Obstacles trip us up. New life cannot take root. There is no space. There is no depth. We live at the surface. We cannot put down roots or go deep. What rocks are filling the soil of your life today?

What patterns, habits, attitudes are tripping you? What is blocking your way? What do you need to do to clear the rocks from the land of your life?

Other times life is thorny. The thorns of old wounds, guilt, shame, or regret choke out the possibilities of something new.

Our life is constricted and strangled by the past. We are pricked by the barbs of our own inconsistencies and contradictions. What thorns are choking your life today? What is keeping your life small and constricted? What needs to be weeded from the garden of your life? Where would you start?

And then there are those times when our life is fertile, open, receptive, rich in nutrients, flowering, flourishing, and fruitful. Life is beautiful and fragrant. We are blossoming and our seeds yield “in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” And it all started with a seed and a Sower who went out to sow.

What is flourishing and flowering in your life today? Are you sharing it with others? What do you need to keep the soil of your life receptive and fertile?

Despite the imagery Jesus uses in today’s gospel this parable is not about farming or gardening. You know that and so do I. It is about us, you, and me.

It is about our lives, marriages, parenting, and friendships. It is about our work and our faith. It is about those who are struggling and holding on by a thread. It is about injustice and the violence we do to ourselves, others, and our environment. It is about living with meaning and purpose.

It is about healing, wholeness, and well-being for others as well as ourselves. It is about hope and our future. It is about the coming of God’s kingdom, the one we pray for every Sunday.

“Hear then the parable of the Sower.” Amen