

4 Pentecost Yr A, 10/07/2011  
Matt 13:1-9, 18-23  
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“Sowing the Seed”

Parables. Jesus loved to teach in parables. Parables often have a profound way to play with our minds; tease them a bit; stretch them and provoke growth; surprise us; inspire us to look at life from a different perspective; and even cause us to consider a change of heart or mind or a way of doing something. The parables of Jesus are often profound word pictures that wake us up; grab our attention; and teach us the truth of God's kingdom and our role and place in it. Today's parable is certainly no exception.

The parable, in most Bibles, is referred to as “The Parable of the Sower.” There is nothing wrong with that title—however; I would be inclined to add three more words to it, so that it would then be “The Parable of the Sower and the Seed.” I think the words “and the seed” are appropriate because the parable focuses a lot of attention on the seeds. Some folks may also want to add three more words “and the soils,” since one way of reading and interpreting the parable is that the soils determine the final outcome of the seeds.

At any rate, the parable is certainly a profound one; it teaches us both a practical agricultural truth as well as a spiritual one. The parable and its explanation is found in today's gospel, as well as in Mark 4:1-9, 13-20, and Luke 8:4-8, 11-15. For us to appreciate Matthew's version of the parable; it is helpful for us to remember that most likely this gospel writer had an audience who were primarily Jewish-Christians; who may have gone through a conflict with synagogue Jews, which resulted in a parting of the ways. So they may have been feeling a little down-hearted and discouraged about this

parting of the ways. The parable, in light of such down-heartedness and discouragement; may well have been an uplifting, hopeful, encouraging message for Matthew's audience. Jesus may be telling them: "Keep on sowing the seeds; don't give up. Keep on preaching God's word; employ every opportunity to share the gospel message. Like seeds that are sown in the soil and germinate and grow and bear fruit; so God's word, when you plant it in the hearts and minds and lives of others will also germinate and grow and bear fruit."

In its original setting, Jesus may have told the parable by actually looking at a farmer in a field sowing seeds there. So he may be saying: "Look at that farmer over there; he is sowing his seed. Some, not all of the seeds will grow and bear fruit. The farmer does not stop sowing seeds because some of them will not grow. In good years and bad years; the farmer keeps on sowing the seeds and delighting in the miracle of growth and eventually there is a harvest. Some years the crop produces more; while other years it produces less. Yet the farmer keeps on sowing the seeds. People of God, you go out into the world and do the same thing with God's word. Keep sowing it. Don't give up even if you see no results, no growth, and no fruit. Some of the people, who hear the word will truly have open ears, hearts and minds and the word will take root, grow and bear fruit. So keep on sharing God's word with the world."

I don't know about you, but there are times when we preachers do struggle with this message. There are times when we, like Matthew's original audience do get down-hearted and discouraged about such little success in our preaching of the gospel. I think most preachers would like to be successful—at least some of the time. Some preachers look at the pulpit giants like Martin Luther and in modern times perhaps some of the televangelists and ask: "Why can't I preach to an audience like that?" Preachers, like members of any other profession or occupation, want to be successful; they want to see

some growth. Yet, the message of Jesus is that we are called to be faithful, not necessarily successful.

God works in God's own unique ways through us all—even when we cannot always see it. The apostle Paul, in I Corinthians 3:6, said that he planted, Apollos watered, and it was God who gave the growth.

So keep planting and watering the seed; keep on preaching God's word; share the gospel in thought, word and action with others. Recently I read somewhere that in the 1940s, China had around 100,000 Christians. However, because of faithful missionaries who kept sowing the seeds and spreading the gospel in thought, word and action; in our present day, the number of Christians in China are in the millions. The early missionaries often struggled and had limited success. Some of them may even have thought that their work fell on deaf ears, hardened hearts and closed minds. Yet, the seed, the gospel, once sown; may have taken some time; just like it takes time to grow a crop; and now look at the fruit—millions of people are Christians in China today! The same is true in many African nations—Christianity has grown and spread there to millions of people too, thanks to missionaries who sowed the seeds and spread the gospel. So keep on sowing the seed; sharing God's word.

One famous preacher who also is a seminary professor and has taught preachers how to preach is Fred Craddock. He tells of the surprise of discovering that you never know how sowing seeds; how preaching God's word can have an influence on those who hear it. Listen to his story:

[Professor Craddock says] I was called back to Oklahoma while in Atlanta. The voice on the phone didn't have to say who she was. She just began by saying, "Ray died." He was a friend of mine in a little church where I had served. It had been years and years and years. We were good friends.

“Ray wanted you to come and have his funeral, if you could.” “I’ll come,” I said.

There was the funeral, where I talked to Mary and the others, and all the family was gathered. The little church in that town gave a fellowship dinner following the funeral. We came from the graveyard to the church, and the women of the church had spread a nice meal. We sat around and talked, and as the peripheral people began to drift away, it left only the family. Kathryn was there. She was the oldest daughter. When I served that church, she was thirteen years old. I remember her when I left, and she was the worst thirteen-year-old I had ever seen. I mean, she was noisy, in and out, pushing, shoving, breaking things, never stayed in the room, out of the room, never paid attention. When I left there, I could have said, “If there’s one person that doesn’t know a thing I’ve said in the time I was here, it would be Kathryn.”

Kathryn, now an executive with the telephone company, has premature gray sprinkled in her hair. We were sitting at the table talking, and I said, “I’m sorry, it’s such a tough time.” She and her dad were real close. I said it again.

She said, “It is tough. When Mother called and said Dad had died of a heart attack, I was just scrambling for something. Then I remembered a sermon you had preached on the meaning of the Lord’s supper.”

I said, “You’re kidding, Kathryn,” and she told me something I said in that sermon.

Who knows? Who knows?<sup>1</sup> So keep on sowing seeds; preaching the gospel; sharing God’s word and it will bear fruit. Thanks be to God!

1 Cited from: Fred B. Craddock, edited by Mike Graves & Richard F. Ward, *Craddock Stories* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), pp. 30-31.

