

But that on the good ground are they which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience. St. Luke 8:15

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The Parable of the Sower is one of the many stories told by Christ's which can be called "Parables of the Kingdom."

The kingdom the heaven is like a mustard seed, Jesus tells the crowds on the shores of the Sea of Galilee; or like treasure lying buried in a field; or like yeast, or like a pearl of great price; or like a net let down into the sea.

And in all of these parables Jesus uses His words almost as poetry: speaking of God's Kingdom in images as familiar to his audience as the crops in their own fields and the loaves of bread in their ovens. But always with an explosive twist.

Jesus seems to be saying that you don't have to look for strange and exotic things to find God's kingdom; that even ordinary everyday things can be the place where God's kingdom unfolds before us; that these everyday images can actually answer some of the questions which are deepest to our hearts.

As you know, parables work by stealth: they get past our normal scepticism and our self-confidence; they get around our usual defences and get themselves lodged into our minds; waiting until that moment when suddenly the light comes on and the picture comes into focus and our thinking is turned upside down.

Which is perhaps the reason why Jesus ends so many of his parables with words that we know by heart: *He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*

In other words, go home and think about it, Jesus seems to be challenging them. Go home and pray. And wait for the Spirit to open your minds. And to change your hearts.

The Parable of the Sower is familiar to us all. A Sower casts seed on four different types of soil: first, on the packed ground of a footpath; secondly, on ground that is filled with rocks; then ground that is thick with thorns; and finally, on good fertile soil. As we can imagine, depending on where it lands, the seeds are eaten by birds; or spring up quickly and then wither away; or get choked off by the thorns; while, thankfully, some take root and bring forth a great harvest.

And I suspect that when we hear this Parable we immediately to start thinking about what kind of soil we might be in response to God's Word: how many birds are there in my spiritual soil, for example; or how many rocks; or how many thorns? In other words, is my heart so hardened by life that God's Word can't enter in? Am I so distracted by the minutiae of my daily routine that God's Word only makes a difference for a moment; for a day or two? Or do I allow the difficult moments of my life to cut down my faith. Or concern for the transitory things of life to choke off the Word. And heard in that way, the Parable of the Sower is a challenge to my life, a call to improve the soil that God's Word might bring forth a greater harvest. That my life might in every way be more Christlike.

And while those are always important questions to ask, when I do that, I change the focus of the parable from the Sower to the soil. But Jesus calls this the Parable of

the Sower¹; so perhaps there's cause for us to focus not just on the different types of soil in this story but on the Sower. And, I don't know about you, but the first thing that comes to mind when I think about the Sower is the sheer recklessness with which he goes about his business.

Now, I don't claim to know much about the business of planting and harvesting, but something tells me that there's supposed to be a little more thought given to it than we see in this story. Something tells me that good sowing requires some planning, to make sure that we're using the seed efficiently and wisely. That would seem to be the way that the world works: bigger machines, better technology, better science, all working together to bring about the best possible harvest. But that's not at all what we see in this story. Not in the least. We see a Sower who casts care to the wind, with apparently no thought at all to where all of this seed is going to land.

And I hope that tells us something important about God, for that, of course, is who the Sower is. It tells me something about the extravagance of this God, a God who seemingly throws His love around in abundance; a wasteful, Prodigal God who seems less concerned about checking up on the quality of my soil than He is with making sure that He spreads that seed; that He spreads the Word, as widely as he can. God is an extravagant God who sows the Word extravagantly; abundantly; generously. A gracious God who sows His Grace freely.

As you know, the Season of Lent is coming soon; but how many of us will take on any serious discipline? Not just giving up a bit of chocolate, but something more serious and substantial. How many of us think that we have the time, or the money, or the energy, to expend on a holy Lent? We assume that our calendar is already filled up; that our money is already committed; that our energies are directed to other things.

These days we can find all kinds of advice about how to de-clutter our homes. Or how to weed our garden. But what about our souls? Do we need to put a dumpster on the front lawn of our souls and start throwing stuff out? Like selfishness. And apathy. And indifference. And worry.

The Season of Lent is a time to try on a smaller scale the kinds of things that we have trouble doing on a larger scale. A time to practice the skills which can change our lives. Lent is a time to be nourished by the discipline of prayer and self-examination; a time to weed out the everyday impatience and resentment that clog up our lives; a time to give room for our hearts to grow by thinning out the self-consumption that stifles real love. The traditional tools of Lent are time-tested ways of enriching our lives; tools offered to produce an even greater harvest.

And in a sense God doesn't ask us to worry about the harvest: He only asks us to sow our love and our mercy and our kindness and our patience and our compassion; not just in the good soil but in every type of soil possible; without giving a moment's thought for what kind of harvest may come.

So, where is God calling you to be the Word spoken this day? What situation; what person; what moment needs you to speak of the hope and the compassion and the mercy that God has generously offered to you; and which he wants to offer freely and graciously, to all?

¹ St. Matthew 13:18