

ARE WE THE GOOD SOIL?

“As for what was sown on good soil ... he indeed bears fruit, and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” In the name of the ...

This is the parable of the sower. In the parable, some of the seed works well, some does not. Why? Wherein lies the problem? Is it the seed, or is it in the one who sows the seed, or is it in the soil itself?

Is it in the seed? No, the seed is the word of God, and it is always the same. The word of God has the power to save people from their sins and to transform them into God’s likeness. It gives true understanding to everyone whose ears are open to the truth of Christ. It has the power to save. St Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation.” Soon after seeing the latest royal wedding, I was lamenting to my friend Nodell Dennis about the continued misbehaviors of the royal family in England, despite their deep association with the Church of England. “I’d just think they should be able to live a more moral life.” Nodell said, “Now, you know better. Either you get it or you don’t. Either you get it, and do what Christ wants or you don’t.” I responded, “Yes, you are right. But I would think that since they are so involved with the church, they’d at least sense an obligation to act right - for the sake of England’s moral fabric.” But Nodell is right: Either you get it or you don’t. You have either accepted the word of God - the seed - and come to know Jesus Christ personally and are changed by that relationship, or you only know about Him, and He has had little or no effect on you. No, the problem does not lie with the seed.

Is it in the sower? The sower is the man spreading the seed - he represents Christ and all His disciples - even to this day. Is it the sower who spread the seed in bad places instead of making sure it lands only on the good soil? No, it is the duty of the church to spread the word of God everywhere. If the word is rejected, Jesus said, “shake the dust from your feet” and move on. Besides, the farmer knows that even in rocky ground, there might be a small patch or two where the seed can grow well, or among the thorns, and even right close to the road. Why, grass can grow even on the little trap of dirt on the bottom edge of my garage door! It looks really funny going up when I push the button.

So, since there is an endless supply of seed, the man casts it everywhere. That’s what the church is supposed to do - it spreads the good news of Christ to ALL persons, never assuming that it can’t find the soul of a listening heart. How many missionaries have gone into the darkest drug-infested streets of America and return with testimonies of life-changing conversions? It only takes one to make it worthwhile. Nicky Cruz - a drug warlord in New York City - was converted to Christ because David Wilkerson felt led to spread the word of God in one of the most unlikely places in America. So, no, the problem does not lie with the man sowing the seed.

So, is it in the soil itself? The soil represents the different conditions of the people who hear the word of God and accept it or reject it. Even though it is called the “Parable of the Sower,” the

parable is really not about the lack of good judgement of the man sowing the seed, nor about the quality of the seed, but about the various conditions of people who have been shared the word of God. Jesus tells this story to the disciples because He wanted them to know that some are going to accept it, and some aren't. And it is not the disciples fault!

Each kind of soil represents a different condition with person the person who hears the word of God. For us today, the parable's value is in teaching us to accept and embrace God's word, and let it have its full, unobstructed affect - to be sure we are the good soil.

Let's look at the four kinds of soil. "When any one hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart; this is what was sown along the path." They don't get it; they never will. Until their ears are opened by God, they will not hear. If you ever wondered why many people in the world never get to know Christ, and never have any kind of relationship with Him, nor even seem to want to, this is why. In the verses between the parable and its explanation, Jesus explains to the disciples WHY he teaches the people in parables. It is so that those whose ears are open will get the idea, and those whose ears are closed by Satan will never get it and simply walk off saying its not for them. "For this people's heart has grown dull," Jesus said, quoting from the prophet Isaiah, "and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them. But blessed are your eyes," He goes on to say, "for they see, and your ears, for they hear."

The second group of seeds falls in rocky ground. Every farmer knows plants from these seeds don't stand much a chance of growing. They may get a good start, but the shallow ground will be like people shallow in their faith. When trouble comes up over problems, and persecution of the faithful, they are weak and don't wanted to be counted among Christ's followers, and will deny Christ. And then they fade away - more afraid of what people will say and do than what God may say or do. Psalm 1 says, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." That describes the person who puts his trust in the Lord and meditates on the scriptures for his guidance and strength. This man is NOT like the seed rooted in rocky ground. The faith of that man will fade away.

The third kind of soil is among the thorns. The thorns grew up and choked the seeds. This describes the man who hears the word of God but the interests, cares and riches of our society choke him out. The plant may not die, but it never produces any seed. This should be taken to mean the people who are believing Christians, but they are so absorbed in worldly success and are so attracted to prosperity that they remain useless in God's kingdom. Their main interests are things of this world. They are interested in their success in society, their financial gains, and what they can accomplish on their own. Their religion is there - somewhere out there - but it ranks a lower priority than the other things of this world.

Do you realize what I'm talking about here? The majority of the American Christian church! They are alive spiritually, but their spiritual apathy keeps them more engaged in the matters of the mind and the body than in prayer, study, devotion, worship and other things that feed their spiritual well-being. They do not seek FIRST the kingdom. Matters of the spirit rank maybe third or fourth. People who resemble this third kind of soil may enter God's kingdom when they die, but they will have little to show in the way of faith and good deeds for God. This is so much the way of American Christianity today.

I ran into a young man at the car wash. He was a youth minister somewhere, and is excited about starting seminary soon. He wants to go into full-time church ministry. "But," he said, "the church is so apathetic nowadays." No one is willing to make a sacrifice for Christ. Sure, there are exceptions. There are a lot of committed Christians out there, and in here at All Saints'. But a great deal of the American church is like the third kind of soil described in this parable. It has grown apathetic, like so much of the church in America.

St Paul said in I Corinthians (I Cor 3:10 and following),

"According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw -- each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."

Gold, silver and precious stones represent good things a man or woman does in acting upon their own salvation in Jesus Christ. They are wonderful building materials upon the foundation of Christ in a man's heart. These people apply themselves to God's word; they learn His ways, they make sacrifices and they do works of charity and love in Christ's name. Wood, hay and straw all burn up in the fire. These are useless things and they do not survive. In other words, people fitting this description will be in heaven, but they built on their foundation only things made of wood, hay, and straw, and have nothing with which to be rewarded. Christ has come into their lives, but there's little to show for it.

I am more and more aware of the "rewards" in heaven. Jesus, and Paul and the others mention over and over about being rewarded in heaven for the things we do: the adversity we suffer patiently for His sake, the good works we do in His name and the faithfulness with which we live our lives while on earth. "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven," Jesus once said. Be excited: you will be super-rewarded and overjoyed you made this choice. Because, when you get to heaven, you will find that it made a big difference to you. Trust Me! But these folks will only get there. They will have produced nothing for the kingdom of God and will have nothing to be rewarded for.

Then there is the seed that falls in good soil. It grows and produces. This is the kind of soil we want to be. These are the people who accept the Christian Gospel and take it to heart. They are not just going to grow, they will make a difference for the Kingdom to come - a big difference. Jesus will be pleased to call them His disciples. They see the cross and are so moved by the sacrifice Jesus made there that they want to make a return to Him for what He did. They want to make it worth His while. They are the ones who know Christ has entered them, because they know they are different, and they sense His presence. Jesus says "this is the man that hears the word and understands it." In other words, "he gets it." His eyes are opened. The word of God has entered into his heart, it has grown inside and he is now changed. He understands what this is all about. He understands what it is to have a personal relationship with Christ. He understands what it means to bear the cross of Christ.

And because of all this, this person produces "thirty, sixty and a hundredfold." Good plants that grow well, produce thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold new seeds. And these seeds produce more, which in turn may produce thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold. If we are in Christ and walk in His way, we will have influence over other people. We will see them in heaven and they will thank us for the affect we had on them that we may never have realized, but God makes it happen.

This is the kind of soil we want to be - the good soil.