



Behold a sower from afar

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Emmanuel Episcopal Church West Roxbury, Massachusetts, on the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, July 16, 2017.

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields... Matthew 13:23

If you've ever planted a garden or sowed grass seed on a lawn, you can relate to the Parable of the Sower. Each spring I sow grass seed in a particular area of my lawn where it never grows very well. If it does take root, by mid summer the grass that was planted begins to fade and disappears. This year I added some fresh soil in those areas and keep it watered, but somehow it still hasn't taken root enough to show any growth.

In this parable of the sower the seed is cast randomly in different directions on ground with different conditions. Some of it falls on a well-trodden path where birds pick it up. Other seed falls on rocky ground where there is no depth to the soil. Still other seed falls in places where weeds and thorns choke it out. The seed that does fall on good ground yields a rich harvest.

This parable illustrates the importance of our receptivity to hearing and responding to God's Word. Jesus as the mind and heart of God is God's Word in human form. In the prologue to his gospel Saint John wrote, *The Word became flesh and lived among us...full of grace and truth.* (John 1:14) Our receptivity to God's Word depends on our willingness to apply Jesus' teaching in our everyday lives.

The landscape in ancient Palestine is a perfect setting for this parable. It is very rocky and arid, making it unsuitable for agriculture. Today, Bedouin shepherds can still be seen leading their flocks in search for suitable grazing land. Where there may appear to be nourishing soil for planting, under it lies a shelf of limestone rock that allows the seed to take root, but because the good soil is shallow, it becomes parched and produces only temporary results. It is rare to find the ideal conditions where soil has depth and is free of weeds to allow the seed to grow.

This parable tells us that we need to listen and learn to apply God's Word in our lives. It is typical of human nature to react negatively to a new idea by coming up with reasons why it won't work. It is better to consider first how an idea could work. Little is accomplished if we refuse to think outside the box and live by the dictum, *come weal or come woe, we'll keep the status quo.* To accept a new concept or approach requires an open and receptive mind.

There are those for whom Jesus' teachings are either unrealistic or too radical. When we follow well-travelled and familiar paths, his concepts can't penetrate a closed mind that refuses to envision the possibilities of a new approach. God's Word cannot take root where old ways and patterns of thinking choke out new and fresh ideas. A limited attention span leaves a trail of good intentions and unfulfilled promises. There are none whose hearing is so impaired as those who refuse to listen, none so blind whose eyes are shut to the truth, none so ignorant as those whose minds are closed.

Keeping an open mind provides maximum conditions for Christ's example to take root, to grow and flourish. Once his example is received in fertile minds, the rest is up to us. To understand some of Jesus' hard teachings about loving those we don't like, forgiving those whom we would rather not, and dying to self in order to find ourselves requires thinking beyond our basic instincts. The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy peace, forbearance, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance are nurtured in our innermost being, they add integrity and depth to our character. The cultivation of these qualities produces the best in us as we grow into the full understanding of the nature of Christ.

I was baptized on this date many years ago and I like to think that a seed of faith is planted in us at our baptism. To date, I have baptized 781 souls into membership of the church and prepared 722 for confirmation. In each of them I hoped that a seed of faith was instilled in them. I often wonder what became of those I have lost track of and have never seen again. On the occasion when I have the opportunity to reconnect, I am pleased to learn of those who are involved in their church and are living their faith in practical ways. I am glad for those in whom the seed of generosity is firmly planted who have an awareness and generosity to help others. We had wonderful opportunity to serve taking part in the B-Safe program of the Diocese. Those who tutor or help serve meals at Epiphany School and those bike hundreds of miles in the Pan Mass challenge or hike for days to raise funds for cancer research are acting on the seeds of faith implanted in them. These are just a few examples of those who act on the faith implanted in them.

My favorite example of a seed of an idea that has flourished is Wellspring Multi-Service Center in the town of Hull. It started as a thrift shop in a rented store over thirty years ago with one volunteer. Now their newly renovated building has over 150 volunteers and a paid staff of fifteen with a budget of over a million dollars serving the needs of people in surrounding communities. It all began with a seed of an idea and a vision to made it a reality.

Sowing seed is referred to as broadcasting just as a radio or T.V. signal. When the gospel of Jesus Christ is broadcast, it reaches many souls in various circumstances. It reaches those in search of faith and those who have lost their faith as well as those in whom the Spirit is firmly planted. It all depends upon a willing and receptive mind and spirit.

Not everyone is comfortable with being introspective, but there is no better time than the present to take a good look at what adds to the quality of your life and what detracts from it. What are the thorns and weeds in your life that keep you from growing spiritually and living a fuller life? The spiritual growth of each of us depends on having receptive and open minds, willing hearts and sincere intentions. For those who are committed to living the grace filled life I encourage you to keep your eyes, ears, minds, and hearts open to what God calls you to do.