

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The parable of the Sower, specifically the one from the Gospel of Mark, is my favorite Gospel narrative. We could reflect on who is the sower in the story- Us, Jesus, God? We could ponder what soil we are- the path- so beaten down and closed off that nothing can grow, rocky ground that is good only for flash in the pan enthusiasm but has no staying power, thorn infested ground so filled with other things we choke out the Word, or are we well prepared, fertilized, tilled good soil ready to produce.

And that is what I was ready to do. But then life happened, and I got to thinking about the seed. Now there is no disputing that the seed in this parable is the “word of the kingdom”. This is the Word that Jesus proclaims so that people will “repent, for the kingdom of God has come near.” It is the Word that Jesus proclaims that calls us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. It is the Word that calls us to turn the other cheek. It is the Word that proclaims God’s wide mercy and unending love for us for everyone. It is the Word of life, in a world that wants to take that life from us and from God.

As I lay there last night, pondering Covid-19, our continued struggle with racism, the seeming ever widening divisions in our society and the people who promote them, the seeming growing circle of injuries to life of those whom I love and respect ... it occurred to me to ask the question.

What seeds are being sown? Both by us and in our own lives.

For as people who have been claimed by God's love through our baptism, who have felt the breeze of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we do have some agency in this, what kind of seed do we allow to be sown in our lives?

A seminary professor of mine from long ago, Cynthia Jurisson, said that Lutheran spirituality is placing ourselves in a position to hear God's Word and share in the sacraments. In other words, we can choose to place our selves in situations where the seed of God's Word can be sown in our lives- time and again.

We can also place ourselves in a position to have the seed of the world sown in our lives. And this is a much different seed from that of the word of the Kingdom, especially the 2020 version.

The seed of the world is one that brings with it the possibility of sickness and death in every human encounter we have. Coronavirus has upended our lives, killed hundreds of thousands around the world and infected millions, even just here in the United States. Right now, it would be the 6th leading cause of death in the US for all of last year. All of it is likely made worse by the fact that the seed of the world sows fear and division- enough so that even when all humanity is in danger- nation seeks only the good of their own nation.

The seed of the world is based in power, in our own power and righteousness. And those who sow it sprinkle in the seeds of fear and division.

Fear of our fellow human beings- because they have a different skin color, because they suggest a different way of governing, because they have different political beliefs, because they live in a different part of this world. Fear that to

work with someone, to listen to their ideas, to consider their life and experience is to- in some fundamental way- risk our lives.

And with fear comes division. We throw around labels like epithets- liberal, snowflake, conservative, fascist. We are told to see enemies at every turn, ones who seek only the destruction of all that is good and right. Those who stand in the way of progress that is true and virtuous.

I would imagine we all have a mental image of that seed in our minds right now. I would also imagine that it looks a lot like those things and people we are opposed to. I would invite you to honestly consider how the seed of your preferred way of seeing things compares to the seed of the kingdom.

And I freely admit, that is hard. Unless the seed that is the Word of God has been sown and continues to be sown liberally in your hearts.

What seed is being sown in your lives, my friends?

Is it a seed of the world- sown for division, for power, for death and destruction- at least of others... thinking it will keep those things at bay from us?

Is it the seed of the Kingdom of heaven- sown for healing, for care of our fellow human beings, for freedom from all that oppresses us, for life- fuller and more abundant for all?

What seed is being sown in your lives, my friends?

If the eyes are the window to the soul and the ears provide the soundtrack- what images do we sow upon the soil of our lives?

As for myself- I want the soil of my life to depend on what is being sown on it. If it is the seed of the world- I want my heart to be the hardest path imaginable. I want the dove of the Holy Spirit to swoop down and pluck up that seed of hatred, of division, that seed that leads to death, from my life. I want my life to be rocky soil- providing the least amount of purchase for that seed which calls me to view others with suspicion, to see only threat from fellow human beings. I want to have that layer of rock that protects it from taking root and reproducing. So that it might wither in the light of the Son.

For the seed of the world I want my life to be filled with the good things of God- of love for neighbor, pursuit of life for all people, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless. I want those good things to grow up and choke out the resentment and fear that the seed of the world sows- so that it might not bear any fruit.

As for myself- I fear those places where my heart is good soil for this seed of the world. Where my own fears and prejudices have tilled and fertilized my heart so that I receive that seed and it grows- and this is what I become. And then when the bumper crop comes in –this is what I sow on others.

Lord- when it comes to the seed of the world- let my heart be miles of concrete-hardened to that message that would lead me to hate the very image of God that exists in those whom you love.

What seed is being sown in your lives, my friends?

As for myself- I want the wisdom to see where my heart is beaten down by life, by the real challenges this world brings- death, disease, injury, sorrow. I want to

know where those places are so that I might sow even more seed of the Word on them. Because we all know how even on the hardest surface, something always finds its way in! In this way, the seed of the Word is like the weeds that just keeps coming back. And even if it takes years, that seed of the Word will eventually crack open those hard places in our lives. O Lord, may it be so for me.

As for myself- I want self-awareness to see those places where I need deeper roots. Ones to anchor myself so that when storms like yesterday afternoon comes through, I am not bent over or ripped out. Ones that are deep enough that I will be fed and nourished even in the face of the blazing sun of the world that seeks only to wither my faith away.

I want vision to see those things in my life that seek to crowd out the Word of God that brings life. That grow up alongside it and convince me that they are so important, that they deserve my time and attention. That their fruit is what is important. Lord, let me see these things that I might- if not rip them out- trim them back so that the seed of your Word might grow and bring forth good fruit.

But, O Lord, most of all let my heart be good soil. Open to the seed of your Word. O Lord help me break the soil of my life, to till it so that it might receive you. Lord, help me take the crap in my life and turn it into fertilizer ready to grow the seed of your Word. Lord, let my heart be good soil- that your Word of life might grow in me and produce good fruit- in extravagant abundance. That what I sow upon others in my life might be your freeing, life giving, promise keeping Word.

What seed is being sown in your life, my friends? Is it the seed of the world or the seed of the Kingdom of God?

What seeds are you planting in your relationships right now?

God in Jesus Christ has freed us through his death on the cross and resurrection. God in Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit has claimed us as God's own in the waters of baptism- has done the initial work of breaking up our hard hearts so that we might be good soil and produce good fruit.

Let us ask God now for the strength and insight to do the hard work of preparing the soil of our hearts. Of growing the roots of our faith deep. Of placing ourselves in a position to have the seed of the Kingdom sown in our lives- through prayer, reading and hearing scripture, worshiping God, talking with other people of faith. So that ...we might produce in abundance the fruits of the kingdom- Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

I pray that we might all turn our eyes to heaven and plead with our merciful God-Lord, let our hearts be good soil.