

We are about to read a parable that is pretty familiar to many of us. Even if you did not grow up in the church you may have heard about a story that Jesus told about a sower sowing some seeds.

Matthew tells his version of this parable in the 13th chapter of his gospel. A parable is a story that Jesus told that has a deeper meaning. This is a story which can have several layers of meanings.

The parable that we will be reading is the first of many parables that Matthew puts together in this chapter. This is a parable which is also included in the gospels of Mark and Luke. There are some variations to how each of these gospels tell the story but we are going to focus on Matthew's version this morning.

Read Matthew 13:1-23

Did you notice where this sower sows the seed? Does the sower have targeted planting? I grew up on a farm and you did not scatter seed where it was not likely to produce anything. The sower in the story that Jesus tells throws seed everywhere.

The sower in this parable scatters seed on the path. The sower scatters seed in soil that is rocky. The sower scatters seed where there are weeds. The sower scatters seed where the soil is good. This sower scatters seeds everywhere.

The second observation is the use of seeds. Seeds are slow producing. You don't see harvest overnight with seeds. It takes a lot of time. When a seed is a seed you don't know what is going to come of it.

But God seems to be in the business of slow growing seeds. Did God not choose to send a Messiah into the world through the planting of a seed in the womb of Mary? God is all about slow growing seeds.

So this morning I am going to invite us to look at each of these 4 places where the seed is planted and see what we can learn from them. What do each of these 4 places have to teach us about how God's will for our life may be revealed? How do we see the kingdom of God in each of these 4 places?

Place #1: The hard path. The seed that is scattered on the hard path gets eaten up by the birds. Why does a path get hard? It gets hard because that is the place where lots of people have already walked. A path gets hard because people have determined that this is the safest and most efficient place to walk. But in this story that Jesus tells the safest and well-traveled path does not produce anything new.

So maybe the first learning from this parable for us is that going down the route that has been traveled is not our route that God wants us to take. Maybe we have tried to plant ourselves in the well-worn path but we are seeing nothing come of it.

Maybe you are trying to do something in your life in a way that you feel as though other people want you to do it. You are following down a path that others have told you to take. But as you walk down this well-worn path maybe you are feeling as though you are contributing nothing of real substance to the world.

Maybe you are in a vocational field because you are following in someone's footsteps. Maybe you are living a certain lifestyle because you have been told that this is what you are supposed to do. Maybe you are trying to please someone else with the choices you are making.

And maybe you are feeling totally useless or just ordinary. Maybe you are wondering that if you continue to follow the well-worn path that you will continue to feel this way and feel blah about your life. Maybe you are feeling as though your seed has been thrown on the hard and well-traveled path. Some of us know what that is like.

Place #2: Rocky ground. My experience with rocky soil is that it is good soil it just needs a lot of work to be done to the soil to remove the rocks. So maybe you have been placed in a life situation that just sucks. Or is difficult. Or is not fair. For whatever reason you feel as though you have been planted in rocky soil. And like the seed planted in the rocky soil you feel scorched.

Maybe recent events have left you feeling burned. Maybe recent events have left you feeling burned out. Maybe recent events have left you feeling sad or lonely. Some of us know what that feels like.

But even though it may not be fair maybe you just need to focus on removing some big rocks so that the good soil will have a chance to prosper. It's not fair that some people have to move lots of rocks.

And maybe you are the one who is called to remove the rocks that are preventing others from achieving what they are called to achieve. So that you are the one who is called to devote your time to helping out someone who has some obstacles that are holding them back.

Maybe you are the person who needs to accept the help that others can offer you. Some of us find ourselves on rocky soil. And that's not fair. But deep down in the rocks is some great soil if you work hard enough to remove all of the rocks that are in the way.

Place #3: The ground with thorns. Maybe you feel as though every time you try to get out of your circumstances that thorns keep rising that choke out your desire. Maybe you feel as though the thorns around you are too strong. They may be.

It may be time in your life when you need to get out of the place where all of the thorns are holding you down. Maybe you need to analyze your situation and ask yourself, "Am I surrounding myself with people who are like thorns in my life?"

Am I associating myself with people that that are keeping me from being who I am called to be? Am I engaging in activities that are thorns in my life that are keeping me from being what God is calling me to be in my life?" Maybe you need to remove yourself from some thorns in your life. Some of us know what this is like.

Place #4: The good soil. Did you notice, though, that in the good soil that there are 3 levels of success? There are those that are producing 30, those that are producing 60, and those that are producing 100. Are you in the good soil that is producing 30 or 60 and you constantly compare yourself to the people that you feel as though are producing 100?

Even in the good soil there can be tremendous jealousy. So maybe if you are in a point in your life when you are doing well you need to appreciate what your life is like and quit comparing yourself to the person that you feel as though is producing so much more than you. Maybe you need to learn to be content with what God is doing through you.

I end with a story of someone that found herself in all 4 types of soils and what she did about it. Yesterday was supposed to be the wedding of Sarah Cummins to her fiancé. This 25 year old Purdue University pharmacy student had been planning her dream wedding for 2 years. She worked over time to pay for the \$30,000 wedding.

Last week she called off her wedding. She was left with a broken heart and a nonrefundable contract for the Ritz Charles in Indianapolis and a plated dinner for 170 guests. Indeed it appeared that her life was like the seed that was sown on hard or rocky or weed infested soil.

Can you imagine what it was like for her this week to contact her family and friends and inform them that she was calling off this extravagant wedding? Wonder what her parents said when she told them the news? Indeed it was like her life was like the seed that was planted on hard or rocky or weed infested soil.

But then Sarah Cummins thought about it and realized that it would be a shame for all of that food and all of that extravagance to go to waste. So this week she has been contacting Indianapolis homeless shelters.

Last night about 170 folks that are living on the streets in Indiana gathered at the Ritz and had a very fancy dinner. They dined on bourbon-glazed meatballs, goat cheese, and roasted garlic bruschetta. They topped it off with a wedding cake.

Instead of complaining about the soil that she was planted in, Sarah Cummins decided to search for the good soil that was to be found in an awful situation. She did not follow the expected path. She removed the obstacles or rocks. She didn't listen to the weeds that were negative influencers.

And she found the good soil so that God could produce abundantly through her. As a result a party was had that I imagine was close to the type of heavenly banquet that God yearns for us to have on earth with one another.

We may find ourselves in any of these 4 types of soils. Our life may be hard, it may be rocky, our life may have lots of weeds, or our life may be going great.

May God equip you with the tools you need to be productive in the soil where you are planted. AMEN.

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-“Bride to Be Calls off wedding, invites homeless to her reception,” Ellie White, USA Today, July 13, 2017

-Given: July 16, 2017 at Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)