

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23, 2017

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!"

[13.10] The disciples came up and asked, "Why do you tell stories?"
[13.11-15] He replied, "You've been given insight into God's kingdom. You know how it works. Not everybody has this gift, this insight; it hasn't been given to them. Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any trace of receptivity soon disappears. That's why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward receptive insight. In their present state they can stare till doomsday and not see it, listen till they're blue in the face and not get it. I don't want Isaiah's forecast repeated all over again: Your ears are open but you don't hear a thing. Your eyes are awake but you don't see a thing. The people are blockheads! They stick their fingers in their ears so they won't have to listen; They screw their eyes shut so they won't have to look, so they won't have to deal with me face-to-face and let me heal them. [13.16-17] "But you have God-blessed eyes— eyes that see! And God-blessed ears— ears that hear! A lot of people, prophets and humble believers among them, would have given anything to see what you are seeing, to hear what you are hearing, but never had the chance.

[13.16-17] *“But you have God-blessed eyes— eyes that see! And God-blessed ears— ears that hear! A lot of people, prophets and humble believers among them, would have given anything to see what you are seeing, to hear what you are hearing, but never had the chance.*

Peterson, Eugene H. (2006-06-15). The Message Remix 2.0: The Bible In contemporary Language (p. 1448). NAVPress - A. Kindle Edition.

¹⁸Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But 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, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

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There is if not debate, then discussion about what this parable in today's Gospel lesson is really about.

Is it an allegory about the soil, or is it really about the sower, or is it about the results of the sowing?

This parable is located between Matthew's stories of conflict over the gospel message.

In chapter 12 there are conflicts with the Pharisees who are plotting to destroy Jesus. He has been accused of working for Satan. He appears to be at odds even with his family by the end of chapter 12.

Then at the end of this very chapter Jesus will be rejected by his hometown friends because they are not open to hearing Jesus' teachings

and letting those teachings take root in their hearts.

This takes me back to an observation I shared with you last week.

You may remember I said that the passages from chapter 11:2 through 16:4 point out the necessity to discern Jesus' identity, understand who he is,

from his actions and words,

and the necessity to respond with commitment or rejection.

Since last week I have been watching for how these passages through chapter 16 may do this.

Interestingly enough it is the passage between the telling of the parable and the explanation of the parable in today's gospel lesson that really speaks to this necessity,

But it isn't included in our gospel reading for today.

In that section the disciples ask Jesus why he uses parables to speak to the people, to teach them.

Now, the NRSV Bible has a quite adequate translation of the original Greek text, but when we get to the presentation of the Isaiah text especially we hear the formal language of the bible.

I thought today I would share with you something more closely akin to what Jesus may have been thinking if he didn't say it,

and I think more easily heard and understood in today's language.

This is from the Message Bible by Eugene Peterson, a pastor for 40 years who has attempted to make the bible more accessible to anyone who picks it up to read.

Let me share that with you this passage that comes after the parable, but before the explanation of the parable I have already read.

[13.10] The disciples came up and asked, "Why do you tell stories?" [13.11-15] He [Jesus] replied, "You've been given insight into God's kingdom. You know how it works. Not everybody has this gift, this insight; it hasn't been given to them. Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any

trace of receptivity soon disappears. That's why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward receptive insight.

In their present state they can stare till doomsday and not see it, listen till they're blue in the face and not get it. I don't want Isaiah's forecast repeated all over again:

Your ears are open but you don't hear a thing. Your eyes are awake but you don't see a thing. The people are blockheads! They stick their fingers in their ears so they won't have to listen; They screw their eyes shut so they won't have to look, so they won't have to deal with me face-to-face and let me heal them. [13.16-17]

"But you have God-blessed eyes— eyes that see! And God-blessed ears— ears that hear! A lot of people, prophets and humble believers among them, would have given anything to see what you are seeing, to hear what you are hearing, but never had the chance.

For us this message about the heart speaks about the heart within ourselves,

and the heart of the other in whom we sow the seed of God's word.

We have a great story to share.

It is a story of God's love and grace, a story of God's sacrifice for each and every one of his people, a story of promise and hope.

It is a love story that overcomes all adversity, that destroys evil and over comes death with the gift of new life,

not just some time in the future, but today in the hearing of God's word

and the transforming power of that word in your life today.

We don't know the condition of the heart we share that story with,

the soil we sow that word in.

I don't know the quality of the soil, the condition of the hearts that come here before the sowing of God's word,

but like you I know that I am called to be the sower.

We in the church believe there is cultivating to do prior to sowing, evaluating the soil, preparing the soil.

In contemporary evangelism these are the tasks of demographic studies, determining our target audience and communication strategies.

But this passage doesn't speak about any of that, only the sowing.

Now I wouldn't say that studying our community has no value, it absolutely does.

I have taken a cursory look and Rick Knapp and I are going to be looking closer very soon.

But Jesus wants us to stay focused on the sowing, to sow everywhere we go whether there is good soil or not,

in the pathway, in the rocky soil, the bushes and on what we may decide is good soil.

I had the opportunity while in Hawaii, at a Luau believe it or not, to do some of that sowing and discovered that soil was good, that heart was receptive and grateful for the word.

Sowers in Jesus' day sowed by hand and it was not as precise as it is today with our technology that allows the smallest amount of waste.

The seed got scattered everywhere.

But before we go out sowing, telling the stories, we have to be good soil ourselves.

This enables us to be good disciples who can share the story we have been blessed with.

Jesus said,

“You’ve been given insight into God’s kingdom. You know how it works... Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any trace of receptivity soon disappears. That’s why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward receptive insight.

Understanding is then important.

Imagine you are standing on the railroad tracks and understand that a speeding train is coming down the tracks and will run over you in about ten seconds.

That understanding creates insight for life changing knowledge and action!

Hopefully you jump off the tracks!

Likewise understanding allows the word of God a place to implant and become insight for life changing knowledge, and the beginning of discipleship.

This is end Matthew seeks, to make disciples.

Remember Matthew 28:19?

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”

I recall a time when I was receptive and just a little bit of understanding allowed God’s word to be implanted in my heart and

insight for life changing knowledge led me to becoming an active disciple.

It was a weekend retreat in 1988 filled with people sharing Jesus’ story and life changing stories of Jesus creating and growing faith within their hearts.

That was the moment when I first understood in my heart that God loved me, and in fact loved me so much he sacrificed his son for my life;

that Jesus loved me enough to suffer and die for me;
FOR ME!

It changed my life.

That seed implanted in my heart created a life I could not imagine,

a new life that brought me to this place with you, in this moment.

Who could have known.

You likewise have been blessed.

Blessed are you eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear.

I bring us back to the original question, who is Jesus for you and how do you respond?

How does the seed implanted in your heart grow,
give you insight for life changing knowledge and send
you to share it?

How would this sermon end if it ended with a story about you?

Amen