

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost—Proper 10—Year A  
Isaiah 55:10-13  
Psalm 65:(1-8), 9-14  
Romans 8:1-11  
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The **parable of the sower**—what a rich, rich story! **A great crowd has gathered around Jesus.** So great that **he has to get in a boat and row out a ways to address them.** Quite a scene to imagine. And he **tells them many things, *always using parables, always using stories, and not just any stories,* but stories that draw you in with the familiar and *then* turn you and your world upside down.** A good parable will leave you pondering things for a good long while, and **Jesus is the master of this narrative form.** *And,* to that agrarian culture, **nothing could be more familiar than a sower, and seeds, and what conditions are needed to make them grow.**

So, the sower goes out to sow, and some seeds fall upon the path, and the birds come and eat them up; and some seeds fall on rocky ground where there's not much soil, and they spring up quickly since there's no depth of soil, but when the sun rises up, they get scorched, and since they have no root, they wither away; and some seeds fall among thorns, and when the thorns grow up, they choke the life out of them; and some seeds fall on good soil and bring forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. And Jesus closes out the story with "Let anyone with ears listen!"

Okay, can we just start by admitting that the **sower is not very discriminate** in *how* he is sowing seeds, nor is the **sower systematic** about *where* he's sowing seeds? This makes **the accountant/Myers-Briggs "J" in me go nuts.** My goodness, it's just like **he's tossing them up in the air and letting them land wherever they will.** It's like the **sower's job is just to sow seeds all over the place *trusting* that *some* will land in a place where they will have the **capacity to take root and bear fruit.****

The **disciples** recognize that **Jesus is telling a whole lot of stories,** most of which **neither they, nor the crowds, fully grasp.** In a section omitted in the lectionary today, they question **Jesus** about that. "**Why do you speak to them in parables, Jesus?**"

**Jesus** gives a pretty complicated answer about how **to the disciples it's been given to know the secrets of the kingdom, but not to the crowds.** And all this stuff about how *seeing* they (that is, the crowds) *don't see,* and *hearing* they *don't hear, nor do they understand.* And how **this people's heart has grown dull,** and *their ears are heavy of hearing,* and *their eyes have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes,* and *hear with their ears,* and *understand with their hearts,* and *turn* for **Jesus to heal them.**

But the **disciples,** **Jesus** tells *them,* "**But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.**"

Uh, *yeah, totally* **Jesus,** I *totally* understand what you're saying. Uh, *no, not really,* I'm actually not sure I'm getting this. So, does that make me a crowd person, OR a disciple???

**Jesus** must have **seen something in disciples' eyes,** and *maybe in ours too,* because **he then proceeds to explain the parable to the disciples** who supposedly should have gotten it from the get-go.

But before we get to **part two of today's passage**, let's pause for just a moment and sit with this sort of **bizarre way that Jesus is talking to his disciples about the crowds**. Maybe **he's just venting a bit with his inner circle**, but **maybe he's also trying to open up a truth to his disciples because Jesus knows that, on any given day, we're all in the crowd**.

**Our hearts can absolutely grow dull**, maybe as the **ultimate defense mechanism from holding so much**, and *sometimes*, we **don't see what's right in front of us**, either from **distraction** or from **ignorance** or from a **quite intentional looking away or closing of our eyes**, and *sometimes*, our **ears are heavy with hearing all that there is to hear**, and so **sound comes in**, but **nothing penetrates us**. And we **just don't understand**. In the Greek, this word for **"understand"** means *"to bring together, to join together, in the mind."* Jesus is saying that, *sometimes*, we're **just not bringing things together in our mind**, and, *one step more*, we're **not bringing things together in our heart**.

And *when all that is going on*, the **only way Jesus can get to us** is to **draw us in with a story that will help us to see and hear in a whole new way**, so that we can **bring things together in our mind and our heart in a whole new way**. Jesus uses a **story we can sink our teeth into**, familiar terrain that will **orient us**, SO THAT he can *then* **disorient us**, SO THAT he can *then* **reorient us to what really matters**. *Jesus is savvy when it comes to getting to our hearts*.

But **back to his explanation to the disciples about this parable of the sower**. *Four situations*, and each of these has to do with **how we hear the word**, where it lands, and where it goes from there.

**First, what's sown on the path**. This is the person who hears the word of the kingdom but just can't **put it together in their mind**—a *piece* of it has landed in their heart, but **not the fullness** of it. According to the Greek, the **evil one** is a force that feeds off of **pain and anguish and harassment and toil and inflicts the same**, and this force comes in and claims for *their* cause what was sown in the heart, and because **it's not anchored in the fullness of the kingdom**, it is easy to snatch away.

**Second**, that which is sown on **rocky ground**. Oh, this is the one who **hears the word and receives it with joy**, takes it into their being, but they **don't have any roots**. They just **stay on the surface** with it. And when **trouble arises on account of that word**, and **trouble will always arise on account of the word**, they **immediately fall away**. They have **no staying power, no endurance, no perseverance**.

**Third**, that which is sown among the **thorns**. This one **hears the word**, but the **cares of world**—in the Greek, the **anxieties of the world** (*none of those lately*)—and the **deceitfulness of riches and wealth choke the word**, and it bears **no fruit**; it can't bear fruit; it can't yield what it was meant to yield.

But as for what was sown on **good soil**—this is the one who **hears the word and brings it together in their mind and in their heart**; *this one indeed bears fruit*. They yield what they are meant to yield—to **varying degrees** to be sure, but they are **bearing the fruit that they are meant to bear**. It's not the **volume that matters**, but the **bearing of the fruit** one is meant to bear—*all of it matters*.

For Jesus, *the word* is **expansive**—it's that which he teaches, the **parables he tells**, the **sermons he gives**—like *the Sermon on the Mount*—the **questions he answers** and the **ones he refuses to engage**; *the word* includes the words of **compassion and healing** he speaks, and **his joining together the two great commandments**—to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength AND to love our neighbor as our selves. And **BECAUSE IT'S JESUS**, *the word* is also made **flesh** and encompasses **how we live our lives, where we locate ourselves, where we plant our presence and how we move through this world in the fullness of who we are**.

***What pieces of the kingdom are you struggling to put together in your mind and heart, and what forces of pain and anguish are harassing your heart and threatening to claim what has been planted there for their own evil, harassed, pained agendas?***

***Where are you feeling roots lacking? How are you building a sustainable and resilient way to hold fast to the way of Jesus that will see you through times when trouble comes and people don't like the witness of your cruciform and relentlessly resurrected life?***

***Of the plethora of anxieties in our world today, which are the ones that have a chokehold on you? And how are riches and wealth deceiving you; how is the ever-present fear of not having enough causing you to grab for fruit and cling to fruit thereby hindering your capacity to bear fruit?***

***And how are you hearing the word that Jesus is speaking, words of good news and power and light and love and healing, how are you hearing the word and cultivating good soil in your mind and heart to be ready to receive it? How are you bringing that word together in your mind and heart and sinking down a rich network of roots that can then sustain growth in so many vital and lifegiving directions? How are you bearing the fruit you are meant to bear in this world in this moment?***

***Jesus gives us this parable today as a gift. It's not one that comes all tied up in a bow, but it's one that leaves us with so many questions and places to explore. Turns out there's more to sowing seeds than we thought, and certainly more to cultivating the soil which can sustain their growth. Today, join Jesus in getting your hands blessedly dirty; join him in the garden of this world, and even more, the garden of your life where his word is always yearning to take root and grow. Amen.***

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July 12, 2020