

6 Pentecost / Proper 10

July 16, 2017

Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Isaiah 55:10-13

God's purpose will be fulfilled.

Romans 8:1-11

Those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The parable of the sower: Rather, of the four soils.

The Gospel story today is usually called the Parable of the Sower; it is really a story about the Four Soils that the seeds were cast upon.

- Who is the sower? (Jesus)
- What is the seed? ("the Word of the Kingdom"-v19; Christian truth)
- What is the soil? (What the Word finds where it falls: our openness)

In three out of four cases, the seed does not produce a plant that bears fruit. The skill of the sower and the quality of the seed are not the problem. The hazard keeping the seed from bearing fruit is the quality of the soil. For the teachings of Jesus to bear fruit in our lives and to affect other lives, we need to understand what Jesus is saying about the quality of the soils. I suggest that we examine the truth that **each of us has a mix of all four kinds of soil** at work in us.

On the Path: Some days I feel that I have been too busy for God; too busy for church; I have felt weighed down by conflict among branches of the church; I have seen more judgment than love by church-going people; I have seen some people hurt by people who call themselves Christians.

For the times that we realize that our spiritual life has become beaten down like a well worn foot path, we can decide to step off the path, and make a fresh start for having time with God. We can give ourselves a chance to let the God in us come out. When I was part of a diocesan team who traveled to Tanzania in 2011, my group visited 13 parishes in one day. Every one of those churches met us with 20-50 people, singing and dancing, waving branches, wanting to shake our hands. Some had been waiting for us for more than four hours. But all I saw was joy, excitement, and gratitude for our visit. I saw that God was firmly planted in them.

What works for you when life feels too busy for God?

On Rocky Ground: This is the case of shallow planting; we can fall in love with vestments, candle stands, incense, and formal prayers; but we can lack depth of faith to sustain us when something difficult to handle hits us.

When we recognize times that our spiritual roots are shallow, and the shoots are feeling fragile, we can clean out the rocks, and add Miracle Grow to our soil. We can join a Bible study; buy a good study Bible; and listen to inspirational audio messages. In Tanzania, almost every church I visited had a portable generator (no electricity), huge speakers, a big amp, and music that filled the air throughout the village. When we arrived, even if only 20 people met us, within 10 minutes there

were 75 people in the church. Music is a huge part of their Miracle Grow plant food. **What works for you when you are working on your spiritual roots?**

Among Thorns: This represents when we try to balance being God-centered with being career-centered, self-centered, money-centered, house-centered, or gadget-centered. We have 20 balls in the air all the time, and church is just another one of the balls in the air. We have good intentions for our spirituality, but those intentions only work out when time allows.

In these times, when our spiritual life is being choked by all the distractions of life, we can shed load; we can delegate activities off our action list; we can re-prioritize. This means dropping off a committee, resigning from a group, saying ‘no thanks’ to an invitation, suggesting a different way to meet: by email or 3-way calling or FaceBook video (pre-marital counseling yesterday by FB video chat)! **What do you do to ensure that your faith life is the priority in your life?**

Good Soil: This is when we cherish being in God’s presence, we celebrate it, and we incorporate it into our thought process for everything we do.

Paul explains that those who decide to live “according to the Spirit”, are under the rule of God; and that decision brings renewal of life. God’s Spirit comes to dwell in us, and we can’t settle for living ‘in the flesh’, but instead we work toward life ‘in the Spirit’. Using the idea of soil from Jesus’ parable today, you and I can prepare our own spiritual soil – our openness to God’s word - so that God will thrive in our life. **The lesson for us today is to check the status of our spiritual soil;** Do God’s word and will have a chance of growing here? If not, let’s add soil amendment: we can add spiritual Miracle Grow to our lives.

One more way we can change the spiritual soil God finds is **by each of us also being a seed thrower**. Practice random acts of kindness. It sounds corny, but it turns heads in an un-loving world. And it spreads. (holding a door open at McDonalds). Random acts of kindness spread.

Care nothing for the outcome of the seed-sowing. Fling seeds everywhere. That would make no sense to a farmer (right Grant?), but God’s seed is no ordinary seed. Where it lands is God’s concern, not ours. Fling seeds of faith everywhere.

May God’s seed, living and growing in you, be used by God to change the world. Amen.