



One Page Sermon

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The Parable of the Sower

Sermon Recap from 7/23/2023

Scripture: Luke 8:4-15

The parable of the sower is one of Jesus' more well-known stories. It is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In both Mark and Luke, it is the only parable that gets an explanation from Jesus. Which is kind of funny, because this passage also includes the part where Jesus says he tells parables because people aren't supposed to "get it."

Parables are meant to be stories that are open-ended. They defy simple explanation and one-to-one comparisons. The explanation of the parable, unfortunately, often leads people to use this story as a story of judgment: There are four different kinds of soil, the path, the rocks, the weeds, and the good soil, and you had better be the good soil.

Even with the explanation however, this parable defies simple moralizing or categorizing of people who hear it. One way of hearing this parable is that it is Jesus' midrash on the Shema. In other words, Jesus is using this story to explain how difficult it is to follow that foundational maxim of Jewish faith, as found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (NRSV)

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might "

This is the foundation of what it means to be Jewish, and would have been well known to both Jesus and all of his disciples. The three soils represent how difficult it is to love God with your heart, soul, and might.

A deeper look at heart, soul, and might reveal to us the pitfalls of the path, rocks, and weeds. The heart was thought of as the origin of thoughts, ideas, feelings, fear, and desires. The heart was thought of as the source of existence as an individual. The soul was not an immortal part of you that exists after your body dies. Soul literally meant throat, and included life, breath, and being. Might was not about physical strength, literally meant "very." One's "very" was their emphasis, passion, and effort.

Each of the landing places then, were misdirection of

those elements of human existence.

The seeds on the were path were devoured by birds. Heart is the source of hunger and desire, but instead the forces of evil do the devouring.

The seeds on the rocky ground had no roots. The soul withers without connection, community, and deep roots. A soul is not meant for isolation, but is meant for deep connection. Finally, the seeds that were choked by distractions. These are the ways that our "very" is diluted. Instead of focusing on God's grace, forgiveness, and community; people's very gets diluted by greed, consumption, and status.

These are the things that keep us from living the Shema (which Jesus called the "Greatest Commandment" after he added "love your neighbor as yourself.") Yet we are not one soil now and forever more.

Good farmers know that good soil can become depleted soil if it is not tended to. Birds devouring seeds actually till the ground, fertilize it, and spread the seed. In arid areas, places with weeds that send deep roots actually help break up the soil and allow for other life to take root. What is dirt, but little sprouts that grow and wither? Jesus is actually describing the life-cycle of soil. The path, rocks, and weeds, are not doomed to be so forever. They contribute to a symbiotic system that gives life.

So if you are hearing this parable, and feel that your soul is withering, or that your "very" is diluted, know that the Sower still gives you seed. You still get to have the Good News, and given time, community, and the very act of scattering seed can help bring about the good soil that produces fruit.



The Sower, Van Gogh (1888)

**Next Week: The Gospel According to Broadway:
Wizard of Oz, Psalm 139**