

15th Ordinary Sunday July 12, 2020

St. Vincent de Paul Church, Baltimore

Gospel Reflection: *The Parable of the Sower* (Matthew 13: 1-23)

During all the years when priests in the pulpit or nuns in the classroom taught me the parable of the sower, I was always taught to focus on the receivers of the seed – those among thorns, those along the paths, those on rocky ground. I remember having to memorize Jesus' explanatory parallels between the various landing places for the seeds and the varying soul-states of human recipients. I even remember being challenged – or perhaps I did this to my guilt-ridden self – to figure out which of these receivers of the Word I was.

But these days I come to this gospel from the perspective of the sower.

Bursting with the energy of my first retirement spring, I actually planted some seeds in May rather than buying the more expensive, already-established young plants. Nasturtium. Zinnia. Sunflower. Hyssop. I read the directions, planted at proper depth, kept the soil moist. And waited.

Nasturtiums. Yes. A few came up so quickly I thought they were a new wave of the Rose of Sharon seedlings which plague our side yard. I may have pulled up one or two nasturtiums by mistake. A bit counterproductive.

Zinnias. Maybe 3 out of 40. Maybe.

Sunflower. Maybe 1 in 10. (Update: Zero in 10.)

Hyssop: Out of 50, 2 or 3 tiny seedlings so far, but these are late bloomers.

One can hope.

As a teacher for forty-five years, planting seeds, not only for critical thinking and clear writing and the love of literature, but more importantly, for lessons about living life in-Christ, I have scattered thousands of seeds and hoped with all my being that they would take root. When scattering seeds is part of your vocation – precious seeds harvested from the one seed planted within you – it matters desperately how or whether that scattered seed is received.

Sometimes, I was blessed enough to see the results during the school year. On occasion, a student from twenty or thirty years ago will write to tell me that the seed did at long last bear fruit. I'm sure there were also those students whose

hearts and minds were not able to receive the seed I offered, perhaps because of conditions in their own lives, and very possibly because I did not sow or nurture or tend in the way they needed.

And even now, when I verbalize the best truth about compassion and justice that I can muster and scatter it (OK, in that wide field known as Facebook), there are some who reject, who seem incapable of receiving that word, no matter how gently expressed. And it hurts. How can supposedly intelligent adults not “get it”? What other conditions are preventing the seed from taking root within them? Meanwhile, should I just “unfriend” and reserve my offerings for receptive listeners?

And then, as I reread the parable, I realize that Jesus, in this context, is the Sower. In order to tell this parable, he must speak from a boat because of the crowd at the water’s edge. So many people that he is practically pushed offshore. A field ripe for sowing. He has to trust that some in the crowd will receive the word and produce fruit in loving, faithful action -- thirty, sixty, a hundred-fold. He also knows that some will not. Some will have stony hearts incapable at this moment of being receptive. Some will allow the worries of the world and the lure of riches and power to distract. Some may even seek to prevent him from sowing at all.

But what matters to me most in this gospel is that Jesus never stopped sowing.

He flung the Word to the world, never calculating his chances for success. He never withheld from the hard heart or the anxious heart or even the enemy. Sometimes it worked. Sometimes it worked much later. Perhaps, for some, it still hasn’t worked. But Jesus keeps sowing.

Sometimes I lie awake at night, anxious for our nation and our world, so sick, so fragmented, fearful, and angry. The field appears too rocky, too thorn-infested, too susceptible to predators to accept the seed.

But Jesus is still sowing.
As a disciple, can I do any less?

Marianne Reichelt