

Pentecost 9
July 13, 2008
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A seed is a powerful thing. It is so full of potential and expectation. Given the right circumstances a seed can provide amazing beauty or delicious fruit. Provided with good soil, moisture, sunlight, a seed can fulfill all our expectations. To a gardener, a seed is powerful.

Today in the Gospel we hear a familiar story. The Gospel writer Matthew uses this story to remind people of his day to be faithful to the word spoken by Jesus even when times become difficult. Jesus has been teaching about the kingdom of God. He acknowledges to his disciples that some will hear his teaching and understand and some will reject what he is saying. The disciples were confused and asked Jesus to explain himself. Jesus cautions that the word will not always bear fruit. Jesus invites his audience to allow his teaching about God and God's kingdom to take root and grow. He encourages them not to be so shallow that his teaching is easily choked out by the cares of the world. Although we refer to this parable told by Jesus as the Parable of the Sower it is in fact the Parable of the Soil.

As this passage opens Jesus is by the Sea of Galilee being pressed by those who are eager to hear him teach. The crowd becomes so large that Jesus gets in a boat pushes a way from the shore, sitting in the boat just off the shoreline he begins to teach. As Jesus began to speak, he used an image that people in his day understood.

A sower went out to sow some seed. As the seeds are scattered in a wide arc, some of the seed falls on the path. Hungry birds were eager to enjoy the feast coming to devour the seed along the path. Some of the seed falls on rocky ground. The seeds spring up but there is no soil in which to grow. When the sun comes up the new plants are scorched and die. Some of the seeds fall among the thorns. The sower most likely does not intentionally waste the seed but the thorns grow up along with the seed and choke out the seed. Finally there is the seed that falls on good soil and produces an abundant harvest.

Normally we hear this parable and immediately want to internalize it. We think of ourselves as the soil being challenged to receive the seed of the

Gospel. We know we should prepare ourselves by Bible study, prayer and reflective learning. That is the ideal - but how many of us meet the ideal? I'll be the first to tell you it is a good idea to set aside time each day to read the Bible story and to reflect on what you have read. It is important to hear how others interpret a passage and to learn from those around us whose experience may be different than our own. Time each day to be still, to engage in prayer refreshes the soul. However, most of us find setting aside time to be used in this way is extremely difficult in our fast paced changing world.

While what Jesus teaches is true, sometimes God seems pretty far away. It is easy to lose the seed of God's Spirit that dwells within and sustains our lives. The cares of our lives push us further and further from the center. We become more and more isolated from one another and from God.

A seed is a powerful thing. If you pay attention to the vegetation around you you will see some amazing plants growing where you least expect them to be able to grow. I walk to destinations in the city as much as is possible. You have to pay attention to your feet walking around the city. Trees planted between the road and the sidewalks have a way of pushing the concrete out of their way so they can grow. Beautiful flowers push their way up through tiny cracks in the sidewalk. You can see manicured lawns with carefully planted gardens and plants most of us would call weeds flowering beautifully in obviously less cared about yards. The city terrain is a marvelous patchwork of fertile and questionable soil with plants according to their own beauty in both places. Growth happens in every corner of my journeys.

I enjoy exploring areas that are new to me. What I find most amazing are the places where I find plants growing. On many a hike in a wooded area I see a tree growing right out of a boulder. I have seen trees growing on cliffs hanging out over the ocean. I have seen trees growing out of a huge boulder in a creek bed. I have seen trees on a rocky slope of a mountainside, leaning precariously with the wind. There seems to be no place in which a tree can be rooted but the tree is there and continues to stand. In order to grow in such adverse conditions the tree must have great determination and a will to survive.

The news that Jesus was sharing with his listeners is that God's love continues unchanged through the ages. God's love, a single seed, is planted in all our lives. That seed is a powerful thing.

You and I live in a world of increasing unrest. The demands of our world leave little time for reflection and cultivation of our spiritual self. We have been reawakened to the threat of those who think in ways that are difficult for us to comprehend. This week our nation's leaders reacted to the firing of missiles by Iran. Reports seem to indicate the struggle in the Middle East becomes more violent each day. Right here in York, PA, the nightly news is filled with shootings and people stealing from other people for personal gain. We wonder where in the world we can be safe.

Jesus reminds us that God is our sanctuary, God is the safe place that sustains our lives and gives meaning. God is the One who will abide us even in times of trouble. It is in God that we find encouragement, healing and hope.

Sometimes God's seed falls when we are not ready. We are easily distracted confronted with too many barriers. Some of us struggle mightily to grow feeling overwhelmed by the cares of this world. But the seed is there. The conditions may not be perfect but the love of God can survive even in a tiny crack. We have the potential to bloom. God has endowed each of us with the potential to produce a good harvest.

What God asks of us is a willing heart and an open mind. God has promised in Jesus Christ not to abandon us. God has promised to lead us through the storm, the drought, the wind so we might emerge on the other side of life's difficulties. God has promised that if we hang on we can know the promise of God's love for our lives.

Plants are powerful creations of God. Civilizations have risen and fallen. Great cities of the world have come to ruin with only traces of human edifices left intact. What has survived over time? The vegetation growing in the cracks of the concrete or stone.

A seed is a powerful thing. God's love is the seed that dwells within each of us. The miracle is God's power to bring forth a harvest that will yield justice, compassion and forgiveness. Thanks be to God that the Sower keeps on sowing until the whole world produces a hundredfold.

