

This Gospel makes me think of my father because he loved growing things from seeds. He grew up on a farm in Minnesota. Because of his childhood experiences growing things was part of who he was even when he no longer lived on a farm. When I was growing up in Albuquerque, each spring Dad would start a garden in our back yard. He would dig up the soil, add compost and plant seeds. In the fall we would enjoy the fruits of his labor, and mine when I was old enough that the digging became one of my chores. We grew lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, corn, asparagus, cucumbers, squash and rhubarb. Dad liked rhubarb pie, I never quite got that. It just seems like an odd thing to put into a pie.

Dad was one of those people you would say had a green thumb. The secret to his success was compost, which he made himself. He would mix manure with kitchen waste and yard waste to make this great compost. He would turn it and mix it almost every day. His compost was so important to him that when he and Mom sold their house to move to a senior facility, he made me move his compost to our house here in Los Alamos, so I could use it in my garden. I compost now too, but my results are not nearly as successful as Dad's. He really knew the secret to making the ground fertile.

Jesus used the parable of the sower to teach the importance of fertile ground to receive the seeds of God's word. He used parables because they can quickly convey many ideas to the listener, not to mention that stories tend to catch a listener's interest more than instruction. They engage the listener's

imagination and build on his own experiences. Because of that, the listener is more likely to remember the stories along with the lessons they teach.

The parable of the sower teaches us that we need to be fertile ground to both receive and bring to fruition the seeds of God's word. Our own experience tells us that for ground to be fertile it must be prepared – tilled and fertilized. We should ask ourselves, how do I prepare myself to be fertile ground for God's word, what do I need to do to become fruitful?

If we look back at the Gospel to answer these questions we see that Jesus said something that seems a little strange and disturbing. When his disciples ask him why he taught the people using parables he says: *“Because knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted. To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”* This doesn't seem fair. What is this knowledge of the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” of which he speaks? Why is it being taken away from those who do not have much of it?

If we look carefully at the words used in this parable we find a clue as to what Jesus meant and what it has to do with becoming fruitful.

The parable of the sower appears in all three synoptic Gospels¹. Each has a slightly different emphasis on Jesus'

¹ Mk 4:1-20, Lk 8:4-15, Mt 13:1-23

explanation of the analogy of the fertile ground. Mark says: “[the seeds] sown on rich soil are the ones who hear the word and **accept** it and bear fruit thirty and sixty and a hundredfold”, Luke's version says: “the seed that fell on rich soil, they are the ones who, when they have heard the word, **embrace** it with a generous and good heart, and bear fruit through perseverance”, and finally Matthew: “the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and **understands** it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold”. It is not enough for us to passively receive the seeds of God's word, we must accept and embrace them, we must understand them. It requires an active response on our part to be able to gain the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom. This is how we become fertile ground, how we begin to be fruitful.

The words of Isaiah that Jesus quotes help. They tell us that if we fail to listen to God's word our hearts will be blinded, and we will not be able to see things correctly.

We can see this happening all around us in our world today. Society no longer places much importance on Christian values. It judges life from outside the kingdom. For example, society has redefined God's gift of marriage and family, undermining a key element of our social structure. It justifies killing innocent children because they might be an inconvenience to the lifestyle we have chosen for ourselves. And it makes attaining possessions, wealth, power and fame the definition of a fulfilled life. Like the Jews in the Gospel, our society is blinded to God's plan.

I think this illustrates Jesus' warning. The little we had as a Christian society is being taken away from us. If our society remains outside the kingdom then it will be blinded to the meaning of God's word, it won't be able to make correct decisions. If we wish to "know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" we must listen to God's word, we must accept and embrace it. Then we can begin to understand the mystery, that the kingdom is already present the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus' parables are a personal invitation to us to enter his kingdom, to become part of his ministry. He asks us to make a radical choice. To gain the kingdom we must give everything. Words are not enough, action is required. We must be both faithful recipients and bearers of the word. We are not simply recipients of God's grace, he calls us to be collaborators with him, only then will we be able to yield a fruitful harvest. In other words, we must become his disciples.

Are we, as individuals, in danger of having the little we have taken away from us? Will the seeds sown in us be snatched away? Will the weeds of society choke out the word before it can bear fruit in us? Are we standing just outside the kingdom looking in or have we responded to Jesus' invitation and entered his kingdom? Have we chosen to be his disciples?

These are questions we must ask of ourselves. Is just showing up to Mass on Sunday enough to make us one of Jesus' disciples? I'm guessing, that in most cases, it is not. Do we really want to be a part of Jesus' ministry, to be a part of his kingdom?

It may be time for all of us to evaluate our relationship with Jesus. Where do we go from here? What will your next step be?

Gospel [Mt 13:1-23](#)

On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea.
 Such large crowds gathered around him
 that he got into a boat and sat down,
 and the whole crowd stood along the shore.
 And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying:
 “A sower went out to sow.
 And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path,
 and birds came and ate it up.
 Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil.
 It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep,
 and when the sun rose it was scorched,
 and it withered for lack of roots.
 Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it.
 But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit,
 a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.
 Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

The disciples approached him and said,
 “Why do you speak to them in parables?”
 He said to them in reply,
 “Because knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven
 has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted.
 To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich;
 from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away.
 This is why I speak to them in parables, because
they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand.
 Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says:
*You shall indeed hear but not understand,
 you shall indeed look but never see.
 Gross is the heart of this people,
 they will hardly hear with their ears,
 they have closed their eyes,
 lest they see with their eyes
 and hear with their ears
 and understand with their hearts and be converted,
 and I heal them.*

“But blessed are your eyes, because they see,
 and your ears, because they hear.
 Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people
 longed to see what you see but did not see it,
 and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

“Hear then the parable of the sower.
 The seed sown on the path is the one
 who hears the word of the kingdom without understanding it,
 and the evil one comes and steals away
 what was sown in his heart.
 The seed sown on rocky ground

is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy.

But he has no root and lasts only for a time.

When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word,
he immediately falls away.

The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word,
but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word
and it bears no fruit.

But the seed sown on rich soil

is the one who hears the word and understands it,

who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.”