

Sermon
Proper 10, Year A
July 13, 2008
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Almighty God, may your spirit grow, bloom, and fruit within each of us, that any who see us, will also see you.

A woman had a dream. She dreamed that she walked into a new shop in the mall, and to her surprise, she found God standing behind the counter. “What do you sell here? She asked. “Everything that your heart desires,” said God. “Everything.” Hardly daring to believe what she was hearing, the woman decided to ask for the best things that a human being could wish for. “I’ll take some peace of mind and love and happiness and wisdom and freedom from fear,” she said. The, as an afterthought she added, “Not just for me, but for everyone on earth.” God smiled. “I think that you’ve got me wrong my dear,” God said, “We don’t sell the fruits here. We only sell the seeds.”

Matthew's Gospel today gives us the parable of the sower, a seemingly simple story but not really. Where do we enter into this story? Are we the sower or are we the seeds, or are we the ground? Is this an allegory? An allegory is a story with a hidden meaning, a story that operates on at least two levels, the obvious and the hidden. It is up to the hearer to work out the hidden meaning. Many of the parables do function as allegories and the Church has, through the years interpreted some as allegories that are not. This parable is one of those.

It appears that Jesus told this story to encourage and reassure his disciples who may have been feeling discouraged at the fact that everyone was not embracing Jesus' message. There were people who heard Jesus' words and got excited and followed along for a while, but then became distracted by obligations of family or business, and then went home. These are the seeds sown among the thorns, where the words of Jesus fall and sprout but are choked by the cares of the world. There were people who heard Jesus' words and felt nothing, they were not stirred at all, and they had no understanding of what Jesus was saying. These were the seeds that were sown on the path. And there were people who heard the Word and got excited and followed for a while, and then lost interest. This is the seed that fell on rocky ground, the seed that sprouted and then died because it

could not take root. Finally there were those faithful who heard the Word and understood and they flourished and went out to spread the Good News that they had received, bearing fruit in an incredibly abundant way,

When we hear it this way, as a way for Jesus to encourage and reassure his disciples, it makes perfectly good sense. But what are we to do with this? Like all of the Scriptures, we are called to enter into the story and listen for what it is saying to us. I think that the little story of the woman's dream that I began with is a pretty good attempt to capture a part of this Gospel. In the Bible, sowing seeds is a metaphor for teaching or preaching and that is exactly what Jesus is saying. The Word of God is the seed and either God or Jesus is the sower, and what an image this is. I know that some of us are farmers and maybe others have farmed at one time or another. One thing that every farmer knows is that seed costs money, it can be expensive, so you don't just throw seeds everywhere. You prepare the ground and then you plant in the prepared ground so that all of the seed has the opportunity to sprout and grow and yield its bounty. But look at what the sower does in this story, he throws seeds everywhere! I like to change the word "seed" in the word "grace" right here because that is the picture that I have of God, fling His grace about with abandon, so that everyone, everywhere has the

opportunity to experience the grace of God. The incredible abundance of the grace of God does not make sense to us. We are rational creatures, we think things out, and we use logic to do this. But logic and reason cannot fathom God, it is impossible to work out the idea of God rationally. That is the work of faith and that faith is one of the fruits that come from the seeds of God's grace, God's love.

How does the ground, the soil fit into this story? The soil is us, but I don't think that this picture is a static picture. I do not believe that anyone is always rocky ground or always thorny ground or always the path or even, always the good soil. I know that I have been each one of these at different points in my life. I have been too shallow for the Word of God to take root and I have been too occupied with my career and with making money to allow the grace of God any space in my life. There have even been times when I was the path, having no understanding or even the desire for the understanding of God's word. I hope that where I am now is the good soil, the fertile soil and that I will enable that abundant harvest. I hope so. But my point is that this is not a one time opportunity. God does not give us just one seed, God keeps flinging seeds at us in the hope that one day we will be in the right place, that one day God will catch us

when we are in the right place to actually hear the Word of God and understand that Word and then act on it. Understanding and action, those are the signs of one who is that good soil where the seed flourishes. That is how a seed produces thirty fold or sixty fold or one hundred fold, it flourishes.

But now, this story also demands that we change places. We cannot stay as the ground in this story because of that understanding and the subsequent need for action. We have to become the sower, scattering the Good News of the Kingdom of God breaking into this world right now. And we cannot spread the good news like a conscientious farmer, only spreading seeds where we think that they are likely to flourish. We have to follow that example that Jesus has given us in this parable, spreading the Word as if it were the very grace of God, which it is, and as such, there is no shortage. There is an inexhaustible supply and we are to scatter that seed just as God does, everywhere, all the time. We are not accountable for what the seeds produce; we are only accountable for scattering the seeds. Jesus has already told us what the results will be and so we do not have to worry about results. We don't have to wonder "Am I being effective?" We just scatter those seeds, by what we say, by what we do, by the way that we give, both to the Church and of ourselves because the power of God is not

working in us, it is working *through* us. Do you understand the difference there?

We are the conduits of the power of God, God works through each and every one of us when we cooperate and when we cooperate the results are off charts! We flourish and the kingdom of God continues to draw near. All we have to do is sow those seeds of faith, hope and love, sow them lovingly, sow them lavishly, sow them generously and then whenever anyone asks” How are you doing?” You can answer” I flourish.”