

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
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Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT

Gen 25: 19-34; Psalm 119: 105-112; **Romans 8: 1-11; Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23**

**'If the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you...
there will be life.' †**

Today we hear the parable of the Sower and the seeds... it has had many interpretations. One thing it says to me is that true faith—embracing God's Word, the message of God's love and reconciliation in the world—is difficult to cultivate.

The path with the birds, the rocky hard soil, the area of choking weeds, and the good soil all represent the difficulties we humans face in accepting God's message. This story stresses the importance of *understanding*, *perseverance*, and *attentiveness*. At some point in each of our lives, we've made it hard for that seed from God to grow.

Sometimes our lives are like the path with birds— we don't *understand* what God is trying to share or we even *shut our minds* to God's Word (unwillingness to learn, prejudice, fear of the truth, and pride all lead to this) and the message is snatched away... Sometimes our lives are like the hard, rocky ground— we accept God's word and promise initially, only to lack *perseverance* in the face of hardship or disappointment and give up... Often our lives are like the weed-filled area— we get distracted and lack *attentiveness* to follow the Gospel message in the midst of a crazy and "choking" world that lures us in a direction away from God, more toward our own desires... And sometimes our lives are like the good soil— we *understand*, *persevere* and remain *attentive* to God's truth, and *faith* takes hold.

While this parable is about the soil and those who receive the Word, the parable also tells us something about the Sower (the Greek doesn't say 'a sower' it's 'the sower'). It seems strange that the sower is not more cautious and business-like... it seems a foolish waste of seed, to throw it out everywhere in the rocks and on the path, and not just onto good soil. Farmers back at the time of Jesus would till and prepare the soil for planting and would be careful to prevent the seed from blowing away in the wind to unfavorable areas... but not this sower! God's love and reconciliation, the 'Good News' of Jesus Christ, is not just for "good soil," it's for the entire world. The theological message is profound: God's ways are not our ways. We're fearful, controlling, and place limits on our love... while God gives everyone a chance! God's love extends to all, not just a select few. God lavishes love and opportunity upon all of creation.

Do bad things happen? Is there illness, injury and pain? Of course! Just think about what's been happening the past four months in our nation and around the world! Does evil exist? Yes, and that still does not take anything away from God's love. It doesn't disprove God's presence and everlasting love in each of our lives! God's vision for our world includes those who find themselves in strange, barren, ugly, broken places. Indeed, God embraces we who are strange, ugly, broken people.

Paul's letter to the Romans stresses this: God has done what the law, weakened by human standards, could not. God sent the Son to overcome death. And in Christ, all have the potential for eternal life!

Yes, sin, evil, and suffering still exist in the world, even after Christ's victory. God has not eliminated these, but God sent the Son to teach us how to deal with them. The 'good news' of Jesus Christ is that God loves us. God is present with us in our suffering and hardship, helping us to *persevere* and be strong, despite disappointment, hurt, and anger, showing us the truth and the way of eternal life. It's up to us to become the kind of soil that may allow God's way/ God's mission to thrive. So that out of suffering and death may come new life.

One of the most beautiful prayers I know, reflects this Gospel message... Remarkably, it comes from a Jewish theologian, Rabbi Jack Riemer, the *Likrat Shabbat*:

*"We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end war;
For we know that You have made the world in a way
That man must find his own path to peace
Within himself and with his neighbor.*

*We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end starvation
For You have already given us the resources
With which to feed the entire world
If we would only use them wisely.*

*We cannot merely pray to You, O God,
To root out prejudice,
For you have already given us eyes
With which to see the good in all men
If we would only use them rightly.*

*We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end despair,
For you have already given us the power
To clear away slums and to give hope
If we would only use our power justly.*

*We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end disease,
For You have already given us great minds with which
To search out cures and healing,
If we would only use them constructively.*

*Therefore, we pray to You instead, O God,
For strength, determination, and willpower,
To do instead of just to pray,
To become instead of merely to wish." ¹*

¹ From Harold S Kushner, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, New York: Schocken Books, 1981.

As Paul tells us, the God who raised Christ from the dead will give life to us—has already given life to us—through the power of the Spirit! It's up to us to embrace that Spirit, and to persevere and share God's unfailing love. As we come to the altar this morning, and as we venture out into the world this week, may we strive to be open to God's Word and part of God's ongoing renewal of creation!

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