

## Planting Seeds

July 16, 2023 – Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

As today's gospel reading begins, Jesus leaves the house and goes down to sit beside the sea. It is something all of us like to do now and then, especially during the summer months. We leave everything behind, head out into nature and sit quietly at the lakeside.

Then the crowds gather. Jesus leaves his solitude, slips into a boat and addresses them from the shore. He tells a parable, a story to which people in this agrarian society can relate. As the story unfolds, they can picture it. They can picture themselves walking through the unploughed field, scattering the good grain they have kept from the last harvest. There is lots of seed. They simply scatter it. They know that some will land on the hardened soil that forms into paths through the fields. It may be lost. The wild thorns that grow up after the ploughing will choke some of the seed. There are stones just under the soil. You can never tell just where they are, out of sight until the field is ploughed. The seed that lands there will surely be wasted. Some seed even gets scattered to the very edge of the field. Birds scoop up some of the grain. But there is plenty of seed. You can afford to lose some. And some of it will produce even in the poorest soil. As Jesus tells them about the sower they understand what is going on. They get it. That is, until he tells them about the bounty of the harvest.

They cannot even imagine producing that kind of a yield. With even a small harvest a farmer is able to put aside enough seed for the following year. What if the harvest was thirty times what was sown? "With that kind of yield," they are thinking. "I could pay off my debt, put in irrigation ditches and erect a new barn. With sixty times what was sown I would be the richest person in the area. And if it were a hundred percent, I would be able to export grain to other countries. I would own it all," the dream continues.

Jesus simply ends the story there. "Let anyone with ears listen!" he says. They are all ears. Jesus is speaking directly to them.

Matthew had ears to hear. He interpreted the story for us. He made it a parable about different degrees of faith. It is a very different interpretation, a pep talk to the early Christians. Some were excited by the faith initially, but did not understand. They were unable to receive the message. Some, no doubt, did not put down roots. They lasted for a time, but when troubles arose, persecution, suffering, they lost faith. They may even have seen it as proof that there is no God. Some were lured away by worldly possessions. It was more important for them to get ahead in life. Or maybe they simply became too busy to deal with spiritual matters. They put other things first. "But" Matthew points out, "there were enough of those who were fruitful" in good works. Hearing was matched by understanding. They responded to God's call and were open to God's leading. They bore fruit.

And what about our own ears? Do we have ears to hear what God's Spirit is saying to us today? What is the Spirit saying to the Church? What is the Spirit saying to the world? How are we to hear this parable, here in the 21st century in Putnam, Ontario? Do we get it? It isn't enough to hear. We have to understand. And even understanding is not enough.

At its earliest level, this parable of Jesus may have been saying that despite all the setbacks they were facing, God had other ideas. God's realm would come with all of its surprises. The rewards, the outcome, would be beyond imagination. To the uninformed that would have seemed far-fetched, just as ridiculous as scattering seed willy-nilly seems to us. Yet who could have imagined that a motley crew of fishermen, tax collectors and sinners could spawn a worldwide religion that would exist two thousand years later? It is absurd, isn't it?

It is easy to look at the Church and see its shortcomings and failures, its lack of relevance. But perhaps that is our failure to recognize what the Church is. It is not our building, beautiful though it might be. We are the Church. That is why we need to meet Sunday after Sunday. How can we be renewed and go out into the world and be the Church if we are not sustained and nurtured by our faith? Are we in our lives and in our work in the world,

bringing God's love to a world that needs to hear it? Are we committed to the faith? Are we sowing the seed lavishly?

This morning we were blessed to welcome Layla and Oliver into the Body of Christ through the Sacrament of Baptism. These beautiful children have their whole lives ahead of them. Their lives are fertile ground, a wide open expanse of field with the right combination of elements to bring good growth. What seeds will be scattered on them? May they grow to know God's word, planted deeply within them, and may those seeds be nurtured along the way as they grow in their faith day by day. Amen.

Let us pray ...

Thank you for Jesus' teachings found in his parables. Help us to understand your Word and allow it to work in our hearts. Help us to be "good soil" for your work and be examples for Layla, Oliver, and the next generation of how to live in your way. Guide us in scattering the seeds of faith and love, justice and compassion. May we be co-partners with you in building the Kingdom. Amen.

**Readings from Our Faith Tradition**  
**July 16, 2013**

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!'

'Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.'

For the Word of God in scripture,  
For the Word of God within us,  
For the Word of God among us,  
**Thanks be to God.**