

July 10 A 2011

That farmer in today's Gospel story es mui loco.
Any Minnesota farmer would tell you the same thing.
Any farmer in ancient Palestine would, too.
No good farmer sows seed that way.
You seed only the good land.
What fool farmer wastes seed on swamp?
Who sows seed on rocky hillsides?
The profit margin is too thin to waste seed.
Why would Jesus tell us a story about a wasteful and inefficient farmer?

When Jesus first tells this story, this parable, he does not say what he's talking about.
He simply launches into a seemingly straightforward story about a farmer who scatters seed.
But we don't follow Jesus because of his thoughtful lessons on agriculture.
He must be talking about something.
There must be some kind of hidden meaning in the story.
But as to what that other subject might be, he doesn't give us a clue.

Once the story is told, the disciples have a private conversation with Jesus in the verses skipped by our Gospel reading.
They asked Jesus why he uses parables when he speaks to people.
Why do you talk in riddles like that?
What on earth is the meaning of what you just said?
Can't you just speak simply?
Jesus' response is somewhat complex, but it boils down to this:
I SPEAK TO THE CROWDS IN PARABLES BECAUSE THEY SEE ME, AND YET DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT I HAVE TO SAY.
BUT YOU, MY DISCIPLES, DO.
Is that right? The disciples understand?
If any truth has sunk in, it might be some of this:
God is love.
If you want to see God's love and mercy for people, look at Jesus.
In him, sins are forgiven. In him, you are restored to life.
You are empowered by God's Spirit to live as disciples now.

Maybe the disciples understood some of this.

At any rate, in the second half of today's Gospel story, Jesus offers the disciples an interpretation of the parable.

As he does, this earthly story reveals its heavenly meaning, truth about God and us.

This simple story about farming becomes revelation about God and people.

If you have ears, hear.

Who's the farmer in the story? You know who it is.

Who's the farmer? God is.

And what does the story tell us about God?

God has so much seed that even the swamps and the rocks get seed.

When you have seed in abundance, you can sow it to the ends of the earth.

God's love/grace/blessing just overflows.

God's grace can cause miracles to happen in the most unlikely of places.

God's grace can find its way into the most hopeless of people and situations.

God's grace can enliven and encourage and empower anyone and everyone.

God's grace is sent into all the terrain of our lives. All is covered.

That's the sweet, blessed truth of the Gospel.

That's the heavenly meaning of this earthly story.

I'm convinced that there is more meaning in this story, and it has everything to do with you.

The four types of ground in the parable are about you.

Not them, those other people out there who are not doing what they are supposed to be doing.

I'm talking about you.

This parable has to do with you.

If truth be told, there are times in your life when you are hard ground.

The Good News is announced, but you don't make any room in your life for it.

You are too busy doing your own thing.

You are too burdened to pay attention.

Your misplaced values get in the way.

So the Gospel is ignored, the truth brushed under the rug, the ground of our hearts too hard to receive God.

Sometimes, that is true about you—and me—and everyone else.

Sometimes, you hear the Gospel.

It actually rings true in your life.

But you don't allow it to root.

You don't allow it to pervade your life.

The holy message of God's grace doesn't influence every word and action, every value and understanding.

When the truth of Christ remains on the surface, and does not penetrate deeply into your life and spirit, then it is uprooted easily by the many storms of life.

As I see it, there is a part in each of us that will not let God take a strong hold in our lives.

After all, we want to be in control, and God might lead us into the unknown.

In fact, has promised to.

So we hear the Gospel, but we barrier God from getting rooted too deeply in our lives.

The third type of soil in the parable has to do with thorns.

Hear again what Jesus said: "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."

How can Jesus know us so well?

2,000 years prior to us, he spoke these words, and he hits the nail on the head.

We get caught up in "the cares of the world and the lure of wealth."

That is human nature.

It is natural to be self-centered.

But God teaches us another way of living, a way of living that is ultimately satisfying.

It has everything to do with relationships with God and other people.

It has to do with love and sacrifice and giving.

It has to do with compassion and forgiveness.

If you want joy and peace, turn to God, because you will not find them in the cares of the world and the lure of wealth.

The fourth soil in the parable bears fruit.

That's the kind of soil God calls you to be.

God's soil that bears fruit.

Making a positive difference.

Contributing to the common good.

Having your heart in the right place.
Living out life-giving values.
Loving the Lord your God with all your heart.
Loving your neighbor as yourself.
Pursuing justice.
Going out of your way to take care of the vulnerable.
Having a forgiveness-reflex.
Christ lived that way for you. You, his followers, now live that way for others.
Bearing fruit.
That's your mission.

Be clear about this, friends.
In the parable, Jesus is not teaching you about how to plant your garden this summer.
First of all, he is teaching you about the grace of God that covers all.
Secondly, Jesus is teaching you about the call of God to live fruitful ways.
I hear yet a third heavenly meaning in this earthly story.
Instead of God being the farmer and we being the ground, maybe you and I are the seed.
Certainly God sends you and me out into the world to be difference makers.
Young Tyler receives God's gift of Baptism today, and with it a call:
Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.
Those same words were spoken to you at your Baptism.
You are to shine, you are to do good works, so that others can see God's glory through you.
God plants you in the world to announce the kingdom of God, the restoration of the world to God.
Live the Christ life, less for your sake and more for others.
You are on a mission.
Be fruitful seed.

What a crazy farmer in Jesus' story.
What a glorious God we worship.
What a rich life God has called you to live.
Peace to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ.