

A SOWER WENT OUT TO SOW

Isaiah 55. 10-13

Romans 8. 1-11

Matthew 13. 1-9, 18-23

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

‘A sower went out to sow’ (Matthew 13. 3).

Who is the sower? God? Yes. Jesus? Yes. Those are the usual answers and they certainly are not wrong. There are thousands of ways in which God, in and through Jesus, shares God’s self with us and sows God’s life in us. Yes, God and Jesus are the sowers of the seed.

But are the usual answers the only answers? I am not denying or minimising God and Jesus as sowers in our lives and the world. I simply want to expand and enlarge the possibilities, to give the holy words of scripture every chance to take root in our lives, to bloom in new ways and to grow into something we never before imagined or thought possible.

So here’s what I am wondering. Might you and I be sowers of seed? When we hear or read this parable, we are pretty quick to judge ourselves or others as one of the four types of ground: the beaten path, the rocky ground, the thorny terrain or the good soil. But have you ever thought of yourself as the *sower* in today’s parable?

Have you ever had someone show up at just the right time and say or do exactly what you needed, and you knew it was not calculated? They were simply being themselves. Whatever they did or said, they could not do or say otherwise. They seeded your life because they were a sower. By the same token, you’ve probably had the experience

of someone saying to you, ‘Do you remember when you said or did such and such...? How did you know? That’s exactly what I needed.’ And you have no special recollection of that event. You didn’t plan it or intend it. You were just sowing the seeds of your life. It’s not so much what you did or said, but who you *were*. You were a sower to that person.

In our lives we are constantly sowing seeds and often we don’t even know it. The sower sows because that’s who she or he is. His or her *being and doing* reflect each other. We sow because we are sowers; and we are sowers because we sow. Sowing is simply our way of being and living, the way we engage with the world and relate to others. It is the practice that shapes and forms who we are becoming. And the seeds that we sow reflect what is going on within us and who we are. We can only sow seeds that were first sown and cultivated within us. Sowing is an interior practice before it is ever an exterior action.

According to our gospel text, our Lord sows within us ‘the word of the kingdom’. That word is love, peace, hope, joy, forgiveness, mercy, compassion, beauty, wisdom, presence, encouragement, perseverance, courage, gentleness, wholeness, healing, reconciliation, integrity, authenticity. And the list goes on and on. Those are the seeds that Christ sows within us, seeds that we are to cultivate within ourselves and sow in our relationships and in the world. They are the kinds of things that once we experience them, we cannot keep them to ourselves. They sprout and grow within us; and we seed the world.

If those seeds are about an interior quality, so is the soil on which they fall. The four types of ground described in today’s parable are descriptive of our lives and the lives of others. Not one of us is just one kind of ground. All four are aspects of ourselves; you could call them our ‘interior landscape’.

Personally, I've known times when it felt like my life was nothing more than getting from Point A to Point B, and it took all I had to do that. There was no room, time or energy for anything else. Nothing was growing or flowering. The seeds of opportunity were lost, ignored, unrecognised or snatched away. Do you know what that's like? Have you ever lived life on the beaten path?

Sometimes life can feel pretty rocky as well. Fear, envy, anger or hard-heartedness can pepper the soil of our lives. And when that's the case, new life cannot take root. There's no depth. We live at the surface. This is telling us something. Our land needs to be cleared. There is work to be done. I wonder, what rocks fill the soil of our lives?

At other times the thorns of guilt, shame or regret choke out the possibilities of something new. Our life is constricted and strangled by the past. We are pricked by the barbs of our own inconsistencies and contradictions. If that is so, what might need to be weeded from the garden of our lives?

And then there are those times when our life is fertile, open, receptive, rich in nutrients, flowering, flourishing and fruitful. The seeds within us yield 'in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty'.

We need to be careful that we do not make a conclusion or final judgement about the various types of ground. Jesus's description of the four soils is not intended to shame or condemn us, but rather to awaken us. All four types of ground need attention and care, whether it be ploughing to a new depth, clearing the land, weeding, watering or fertilising. I don't know what the land of your life needs, but I'll bet that you do; and I know what the land of my life needs. The truth is that all four soils describe parts of ourselves.

The condition of the soil does not, however, stop the sower. He does not seed only the good soil. He does not withhold seed from the thorny or rocky ground, either; and even the beaten, walked-upon path is seeded. This might indeed surprise us.

But the fact is, the sower sows with reckless and indiscriminate generosity. The sower sows here, there and everywhere without regard to where the seed might land or to the quality or type of ground on which it falls. The sower sows not because of who or what the ground is, but because of *who the sower is*. Where, and with whom do we sow? In what ways have we perhaps withheld seed, because we deemed the ground unworthy? What would it take for us to be as generous as the sower in today's gospel?

The sower does not worry about the harvest or how much it will yield. The fact that he sows anywhere and everywhere tells us that. He simply sows. This isn't the way of our culture. It's not what most of us have been taught or come to believe. We want a return on our investment. We don't want to waste resources or spend ourselves on a hopeless cause. We measure productivity and seek to maximise profits. Yet that's not how the sower in today's parable lives. Again, the sower sows not because of an expected harvest, but because of who the sower is. How would our lives be different if we stopped measuring and keeping score? What would change if we trusted the seeding of this present moment more than we worried about the future yield?

This gospel passage leaves us with two sets of questions. The first is to ask ourselves, what has God sown in our lives? Are we tending and cultivating new growth? And what does the land of our life need? The second is to ask ourselves, where, what and how are we sowing? What in today's gospel frees us to be our better, truer and more authentic sower-self? And are we sowing with generosity? There is more than enough seed available! Amen.