

“Got Compost?”
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Scripture: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Psalm 65:1-8

July 13, 2014

“Listen, A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path...Others seeds fell on rocky ground...Others fell among the thorns...Others fell on good soil and brought forth grain.”

When my husband and I got married, we bought our house, and immediately, I began to garden. I did not know the disciplines necessary to be an effective gardener well. Neither did I that first year have a full understanding of the needs of all the plants or the conditions of the soil.

But one thing I knew was that I wanted to plant a garden and surrender to the magnificent experience that is being one with nature.

This was an experience that, at the beginning, was not always pleasant. There were many days full of frustration because our garden was not doing well. So, I tried and tried again. And I still do.

Many years have passed now, and while I am no expert, I certainly know more about our yard. I understand better the trajectory of the sun. I have become more aware of the conditions of our soil - not only in the vegetable garden, but in other areas in the yard.

In the gospel lesson this morning, we heard the parable of the sower. “Parable” derives from a Greek word that means “to throw along side.” So, its basic function is one of comparison; one element is set alongside the other to be highlighted by the comparison.

Jerome, a 4th century bishop, said, “The crowd is not of a single mentality, for each person has a different frame of mind. He (Jesus) therefore speaks to them in many parables so that they may receive different teachings depending on their frame of mind.”

In the parable of the sower, Jesus tells the story of a sower who sows seeds generously, loosely, and extravagantly...as opposed to meticulously, as most of us do.

The seed, in the parable is unchanged. But it is the soil that it varies, and the seed depends on the soil to give good fruit.

It is interesting that Jesus uses the word “listen” twice in this parable - and he proceeds to give the meaning of it. He compares the seed to the “word” and the various grounds to spreading the word to “different ones.”

So, if the seed is the word, and the soil are those who hear, is it possible that we perhaps need to pay attention to the properties of the soil?

I think that the church today is being called to represent more than just one element depicted in this parable.

First, I think that we are called to be the sower - not planting meticulously and calculatedly as we tend to do, but to plant generously and extravagantly.

The problem is that, as a church, we often get discouraged when we plant in an area and it does not grow. We have thrown the seed in all sorts of potential growth areas, and it is possible that there is nothing to show for it.

But rather than ripping up the garden, let us consider compost.

See, the parable did not speak about mending the soil. It spoke about throwing the seed in all kinds of terrains and understood that the soil was not always going to be *good* and conducive to germination. But, this morning I invite us to consider the soil.

Soon after I embarked on the journey of becoming an amateur gardener, I learned about “compost.” *Black gold* as it is known in gardening circles.

It is made out of scraps from the kitchen, grass clippings, dry leaves, and other organic materials.

However, there has to be some balance to it. When the compost is getting too mushy, too moist and it develops an ammonia smell, it is time to introduce dry matter to assist in decomposing and diminish the “sulfur” smell. It helps make it looser, which is one of the goals.

If the soil is the hearts of those who listen, maybe our work in this 21st century is to cultivate the ground. In order to do that, compost is key.

The right compost has a basic component: hope. Hope can be a dangerous thing. It endangers the status quo. It challenges complacency and structures.

Perhaps, in amending the soils of the heart, we are being called to introduce the good news of the progressive church, that we are a church --

- Of unconditional welcome;
- We are a diverse community;
- Where transformation is for the individual and the world;
- We uphold redemptive rather than exploitive values;
- We believe in forgiveness, liberation, and grace for us and the world;
- We have a future of hope.

And, in the process of amending this soil, let us recognize for ourselves that we have to unlearn some things. We strive every day to learn more and more - as we should.

But this morning, I respectfully propose that, in order for us as a church to be good sowers, to amend the soils of the hearts of men appropriately, we need to unlearn some things.

And, I dare to say, that some of those things are in the way we do church. The body of Christ should be focused first and foremost in:

Transforming lives, healing the brokenhearted; challenging the oppressors; comforting those who are hurting and claiming the good news to the hopeless.

When we make that our mission and our priority, the seeds will germinate and the fruit will follow.

We perhaps need to change the way we plant the word. Perhaps is time to throw it generously – not meticulously. Because at the end, it is God who yields the growth.

Thomas Long writes: “Therefore, the church is called to ‘waste itself,’ to throw grace around like there is not tomorrow, precisely because there is a tomorrow, and it belongs to God.” (*Matthew, The Westminster Bible Companion*). Amen.