



“O, Speak A Word of Comfort to Us!”

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Scripture (NRSV):

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

¹ That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ 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. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ Let anyone with ears listen!"

¹⁸ "Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ 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. ²² 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. ²³ 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."

Sermon:

It's kind of hard to hear or say something new about an ancient story, this ancient parable of the sower and the seeds...when it seems that Jesus has already settled the questions we might have about the story...

After all, the second part of this reading “explains” what is going on with the various kinds of seeds that the farmer has scattered across the land.

There is the seed that gets snatched away by evil..

The seed with no roots...

There is the seed that is consumed by the worries of the world, and money....

And how many times have you sat in a pew, or a chair, or somewhere...and listened to someone explain those three types of seed?

How often have I sat and wondered if I am a seed without roots? A seed worried too much about money?

Did Jesus waste his time on me and you, tossing you out there and you didn't grow cause you were shallow, vapid, selfish? Are we lying around rootless? Are you useful or not?

Can there be something new in such an old story with such a tired out old explanation?

God, I sure hope so!

I do in fact believe so...that is what I find astonishing about scripture...it can contain old old stories that apply to our new new lives, struggles, suffering, or joy!

So, see if you resonate with me, and this story, as we look again at this parable of so long ago.

I am going on 60 now. In a few weeks, I will have circled the sun 60 times. I have lived longer than I will live. (I don't plan to live to 120 years!)

I have found myself looking back at what I have lived, how I have lived.

My older friends, church members, and siblings talk about retiring, or have retired. They worked, now they do not hold down paying jobs. They do other things, now.

It makes me wonder...and I look at my life and say; “OK CastroLang...what have you done with this thing called your life, your work, your ministry?”

And suddenly, when I look at this parable I am not a seed, I am a sower. I am a farmer and I have been tossing seeds out there and hoping they will grow, almost all my life.

Over and over again I have told you, and told myself, that to “follow Jesus” is to do as he did, live as he lived; care and serve and change the world, as he cared and served and transformed the world.

- Be a Seed? How about be a Sower!?

What sort of farmer are you? What sort of farmer am I?

Rather than stare inward and worry about myself as a “good enough seed” I urge you and I urge myself to look around at the seeds we have cast out there, the seeds we cast every day.

Seeds of love to the unloved.

Seeds of welcome to the outcast and alone.

Seeds of hope to the despondent.

Seeds of justice all around our town, state, nation, world.

The inspiring seed of doing your job well and showing self-respect.

Seeds of laughter, seeds of faith to be shared, seeds in a smile to another, in a hug, seeds sown as you show courage.

Seeds, seeds, seeds...scattered all through our lives.

And here it comes: a harvest. Sometimes thirty-, sometimes sixty-, sometimes a hundred-fold harvest!

Oprah Winfrey gave a commencement address to some university, that got taped...she talked to the students about her understanding of her “legacy”...she was sure it was going to be the school she built for girls in South Africa. But her friend, Maya Angelou, said, “you just don’t know what your legacy is...no, you don’t. Your legacy is every life you have ever touched.”

Our harvest comes from the fullness of our lives; in having given ourselves to life!

- You have sown seeds of love and justice and compassion all your life. Wait, and see the harvest!
- You have sown seeds of knowledge and encouragement, of academic and intellectual challenge...wait for your harvest.

- You have sown seeds of health and healing on life after life after life...the harvest is around you!

Oh, we all know that we have sown our lives in many places, scattering seed and if we are honest, sometimes wondering if it was a waste of our time, a dead end, a doomed endeavor...

But Jesus the farmer, Jesus the sower says the harvest is rich, surprisingly rich. Like all things it must grow, it will take the time of our life, but there is a harvest coming, yes, there is.

And for me at least, this is not unrelated to the text of Isaiah that we heard as we entered into worship this morning: it is a word of "comfort, o comfort my people."

When ministry seems so hard, and there is no easy answer. When I have left a ministry and moved on and never known how those others fared after I was gone...a facebook post from someone I served 30 years ago, a relationship that sparked and flamed anew after long silence, a note...these little things tell me there is a harvest.

I believe gratitude is the tool of the farmer who is harvesting. Look around at your life, whether you are 6 or 16, or 60, and give thanks every day for at least five things or people or events, or memories.

And you will reap a harvest indeed.

Bountiful and rich and deep and satisfying.

Try it.

Five things every day.

Not big things, like an A on a test, or a cancer-free diagnosis...though those are certainly things to celebrate.

Celebrate the sun on your face, the taste of your first cup of coffee, the voice of someone who cares about you when they first see you again.

Give thanks, and you will be the farmer at the harvest, whether you are 6 or 16, or 60.

Toss the love, the justice, the hope, the caring, the laughter and the tears...out there into the world.

And behold, there will be a harvest. It will come to you, thirty- or sixty- or a hundred-fold.

Give thanks for the sowing of your life. Give thanks for the harvest!

Alleluia!