

Sermon for 2017 Yr A Proper 10
Preached Sunday July 16, 2017 at St. James', Mount Vernon
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When I began to prepare for this sermon, I grabbed a draft of this service bulletin, and began to read through the lessons.

And when I started to read the Gospel lesson, I thought, Oh great! This is a good parable. I wonder what I'm going to discover in it, I wonder what God is going to say to me, and to you, through this word.

And then I saw this tiny note, at the bottom, that says, "continued on next page."

And I turned the page, and to my dismay, I discovered that Jesus had already done all the interpretation, explaining to his disciples what each part of the parable is supposed to mean.

Yes, I was dismayed. Because I wanted to do that work myself. And I think that active, engaged encounter with scripture is how it works on us, and in us. When the work is done for us, we are only passive, perhaps entertained but not transformed. We need to work with it, struggle with it, get our hands dirty with it, to discover what gold scripture actually holds for us.

I think that is part of how I try to present scripture to you. I look for the surprise, the unexpected, the different angle. Not necessarily to challenge the traditional interpretations, but to challenge you to hear differently, and to invite you to work with and make the word of God your own.

When I started to work with this text by reading the scholarly commentaries, the first thing that struck me was the near-unanimous opinion that Jesus wasn't the one who explained his parable. That's right. Jesus is presumed to have told the original parable, but the interpretation as recorded by Matthew comes through the Church, who wanted listeners to understand the parable in the light of the Church's own experience of bearing witness to the Gospel.

And the Church's interpretation is strong and convincing. There are many different types of people in the world. The seed is the Good News of the kingdom of God, and it is given for all to hear. But many cannot hear it, and many only hear it superficially, and many are distracted from hearing it. But for those who are able to receive the word and let it grow in them, then the fruits of the Kingdom will show in their lives.

The traditional interpretation affirms the faith of believers over and against all those surrounding them who do not believe.

But I don't think it is the only interpretation. If it was the only interpretation, then I don't think Jesus would have needed to tell a parable!

As I've worked with the part of the parable attributed to Jesus, I've come to a slightly different angle of interpretation, and I hope you'll listen to me work with the text, and see if it touches you.

I think that this parable has two important points for us.

One is that the sower is extravagant in casting his seeds about. They land everywhere! This isn't a careful farmer who plants his seed where he thinks it will most thrive. The sower of the parable liberally spreads his seed everywhere. That tells us something about God, who gives himself for all, not just a few.

And the second lesson has to do with where the seeds fall. Yes, the different places can represent different kinds of people, as in the traditional interpretation. But I think that we each of us contain all of those different soils/grounds, and at different times we may receive or refuse God's seed given to us.

- At times we are too busy to receive God, consumed by our cares and distractions.
- Sometimes our hearts are hard and closed.
- At other times we may be without love and trust, without the vulnerability that lets something new enter us.
- But sometimes we are ready and receptive, with space in our lives to recognize, receive, and welcome God.

God is in all of the places of our lives. Not just when we are quiet and looking and listening for him, but equally when we are caught up in all those parts of our lives that steal our gaze away from him.

God is most easily found when we look for him, but he is spreading his fruitful seed even in the barren places of our lives. And I'll venture that those are the places in your life where you most need to see God! If we can remember that God is with us always, not just sometimes, we will have taken a big step towards making more of our lives good, fruitful soil.

Thank God for giving us parables that challenge us to bring our selves to meet his holy Word. Amen.