

“Sow What?” Matt13:1-9,18-23;
Is55:10-13; Rom8:1-11 (12July2020)

You may say that God isn't a good gardener but is a farming failure with a brown thumb, a horticultural imbecile.

If the one sowing seeds in the Gospel reading is supposed to refer to God, then you may be good and ready to give God a word to the wise, with a few agricultural tips.

Like, Hey bozo! Stop throwing into the thistles and chucking the seeds on the paths, and don't pile it on a pile of rocks! That'll do absolutely no good! Be a little more careful! Why waste it?! Who do you think you are, some God-dy Appleseed? Stick 'em in the good ground and focus on that. It doesn't take a master gardener's know-how to know how this oughta be done.

Of course, it may not have occurred to you to be concerned about criticizing God's gardening. It seems our first thought is often actually the odd do-it-yourselfer to wonder which kind of soil we are and how we fare with our seed and how to self-improve our growing conditions. (As if soil got to choose that about itself!)

There's something admirable that we want to be good soil and want to bear fruit, the most prolific possible. You probably didn't think, how do I roll with being rockier?

We prepare for soil amendments and apply speculative growing techniques to ponder adding a layer of compost so we can enrich our human humus and better become terrain where the seed will stick. You may have questioned not just how dirt-y (dirt-ish?) you are but what you need to do to cultivate yourself as the right sort of soil.

We'll later on sing, “Lord, let my heart be good soil, open to the seed of your word. Lord, let my heart be good soil, where love can grow and peace is understood” (ELW 512). It's a good tune and, again, an admirable sentiment.

So if you wanted to make good soil, do you try to attend to your spiritual nature, to adapt practices that put you more in tune with what's being disseminated? (I can't resist some of these words: “disseminated” means spreading the seed

throughout. It's like the word seminary, which literally means that those like Intern Lisa are in a seedbed, the nursery where their plants can begin to grow.) Still, if you need to go to seminary to grow into the plant you ought to be, as good as that is for some, it has to seem like the growth God is seeking is pretty darn limited and much of life would remain uncultivable.

Instead, maybe you want another plant and gospel word; maybe you want to be “radical.” With the same root as the word radish, it means...the root of it all. Maybe you want to be radical, a spicy radish that produces the produce of resistance to institution, that cuts off at the root the systems that foster injustice. Maybe you want that kind of love and peace to be what grows in you.

It can't help but strike me that that not only tries to adapt what sort of soil you are, but also to predetermine what sort of fruits you want to produce.

And I'm forced to wonder whether that's where this ought to go, or if it's an example of being choked by the cares of this world in our wanting to make a difference, if that is a form of the selfish desire mentioned in Romans, to become selfish soils and self-righteous plants that want to boast in what we've done, proud of our fruits. Again, there may be an admirable streak there. But it doesn't seem to square with the metaphor Jesus is offering us.

So what? What do we do with what is being sown?

One thought is not to restrict your perspective. Larry Henning voiced this in the BYOB Bible study this week, that he sees himself in all of these different kinds of territory.

I keep repeating that some of these words from Jesus aren't instructive but are simply descriptive. So there may be times that you are rocky or weedy, when you're scorched and withering, when you're choked up, when there's just too much commotion, but also occasions when it all seems to hit just right.

For now, it may be that the cares of life overwhelm you. There's so much. So much. It's sad. You may be so anxious and stressed that the seed just has a really hard time producing anything

good. It may be that it's all so distracting that it snatches you away, and what was potentially good is gobbled up. It may be that life is so ungrounded right now that, even as you're so much planted at home, it still can't take root. In any of those cases, with Jesus I'm really, really sorrowful. I wish it could be better, and there's not much I can directly do about it or change it.

But, again, you don't need to think about that as a permanent condition. There's hope!

So what about those fruits, bearing what is intended. I'm interested that Jesus doesn't give a value judgment that you're supposed to bear a hundred-fold and not sixty or thirty. He seems grateful for any fruit. And fruit, of course, is naturally what you bear. A radish doesn't make turnips (nor can you squeeze blood from either). It's comparing apples and oranges, but both have purpose. Jesus gives no indication that one fruit is the right one, just that you'll bear fruit. I don't know if that's solving coronavirus or fixing racism or going to work tomorrow or trying to figure out your family today or just to make it through. You grow where you are and bear what you can.

Which maybe also brings us back to the first part of God's lavishness. God may be a goof of a gardener who sucks at seed-planting techniques, but that's because God doesn't give up. God will spread seeds where they don't seem likely to grow and put in effort where thorns infest the ground because God is, indeed, wanton in this casting about. God keeps strewing the seed. Sometimes it may surprisingly stick. Disseminated even in something as stupid as this sermon could be significant and find a place to grow.

If you're still wondering about your good soil and the individualistic single seed, know that God is persistent, sending the sun and rain with good purpose, even transplanting thorns and briars into a forest of good trees to clap their hands, as Isaiah so beautifully proclaimed and we sang ("Light Dawns on a Weary World, ELW 726). That's not the result of one measly seed, but God's persistence to change our whole landscape.

God has that sort of confidence, not so much in you and your ability to improve or that society will

get better. God's promise begins, rather, in the power of the seed. It's the power of the Spirit that is planted in you, not an invasive species but the true natural species that overcomes the sin and evil and distractions and all that has virally overloaded you so that you may fully do what you were created to do.

Even in an online service. Even through a rotten gardener like me. Even where you find yourself, throughout these difficult days, God again casts the seed, that you may grow and be properly you, and the clapping, joyful world along with you.