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"The Crazy Sower"

Genesis 25:19-34 Psalm 119:105-112 · Romans 8:1-11 Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS 25:19-34

Once again, God seems to linger in fulfilling his promise to make a great nation of Abraham's progeny. Isaac is 40 by the time he married Rebekah. Another 20 years go by before his wife gives birth to the twins, Esau and Jacob. Which one will be the one to fulfill the promise? Hear the word of God from Genesis 25:19-34

INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW 13:1-9; 18-23

Jesus was a carpenter by trade, but he was well aware of other trades. He taught fishermen where to fish. He taught winemakers how to make wine. He taught theologians what to think about God. When it came to farming though, those hearing him give his thoughts about farming must have thought that he should stick to carpentry. Hear the word of the Lord from the gospel of Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23

Let's pray. Open our eyes to see your truth. Open our ears to hear your voice. Open our heart to feel your love. Open our souls to sense your touch. Open our minds to receive your word. Amen.

Mark Twain once said, "I can live two months on one good compliment." Sometimes that is all people need. I believe the greatest coach of any team in any sport was John Wooden who coached the UCLA Bruins to eleven National Championships in thirteen years. He understood Mark Twain's statement and had a special way of making sure his players applied it.

Wooden instructed his players that whenever a basket was made, the player who scored was required to smile, wink, nod, or point to the player who passed him the ball. When Coach Wooden gave these instructions to one team, one of his new players said, "But Coach, what if he's not looking?" John Wooden said, "I guarantee you he'll look." He was right, because everyone is looking for encouragement and affirmation. 1

Years later the Houston Rockets are trying to land a third Super Star to compliment the two they have now. But there are far more important things happening in our world that which multi-millionaire will play for which team. Certainly there are far more important things taking place who ELSE will play for the Rockets.

Real rockets have fallen on now liberated rubble of Mosul. Today, the road to Damascus has more Explosions turning Rocks into Rubble than Revelations of

the Risen Christ turning Sauls into Pauls. The ancient seeds of hostility between Isaac and Ishmael ... and Esau and Jacob continue to bear bitter fruit. The conflict that began over a bowl of beans, or as the King James Version called it; "a mess of pottage" has become way more messier. more messy? Now we have Ishmael and Ishmael fighting over a mess of rubble.

Behind the rage and anger and desire for revenge and justice is a profound discouragement. This kind of discouragement is part of what Jesus was addressing in the parable of the sower. Jesus was doing miracles and yet people were plotting to get rid of him. If Jesus wasn't getting a 100% response from the things he was saying and doing what hope did they have? Judging from the reaction that Jesus himself was receiving, the disciples must have been discouraged.

This parable is one of the few that Jesus told that he actually explained. He usually left the story out there for people to draw their own conclusions. But in verses 18-23 he gave the interpretation that the seed is the Christian message, the word of God, the gospel. We, like those first disciples, have learned through experience that the seed gets a different reception from different people. It bounces off some; for some it just goes in one ear and out the other, with others and doesn't take root; and with still others the word gets choked by all the other things in life in which they are caught up. Yet there is hope... for some -- the word is joyfully received, takes root and bears fruit.

Maybe you've read this before or heard sermons on this parable before that focus on the kinds of soil and ask, "What kind of soil should you be? "Don't be like the hard soil, like the path, where the word doesn't sink in and it gets stolen away by the birds...or don't be like the rocky ground, which welcomes the word but doesn't allow it to take root and gets scorched...or don't be like the soil that is so absorbed in the cares of the world that the word gets choked. Be good soil! Be people who believe the word, who study it, who take it seriously, and live it."

But that's not what Jesus is saying through this parable. To focus on the soil takes the focus off of the point of the parable—the sower. This parable is aimed to illustrate the attitude of the sower when it comes to sowing God's word. Jesus told it to Encourage DIScouraged disciples who were not seeing fruit from their or EVEN from Jesus' labors.

The emphasis is NOT what kind of soil am I? Do I make the right response? Am I sincere? Are my motives correct? Looking at the parable like that shifts the focus to other people--look at those rocky, hard, thorny people-- I'm so glad I'm not like them.

The picture that Jesus paints is of the sower's liberality, his generosity. Those who knew farming might have thought, "Well that's one crazy sower!" (Kids today would say He Cray Cray) What does he think he's doing sowing on the

pathway? Who sows seeds among weeds or among thorns? I think some of them might have even broken into laughter as Jesus told this parable.

The sower is the one who spreads the seeds around with such liberality that no ground is missed. Yes. Some of the seed, even a large portion of the seed, even 75% of the seed doesn't produce fruit? The point is to cover the ground. The Sowers job is to sow.

But you see, even in telling the story Jesus is sowing. He is using an image of a carefree, crazy, sower to catch the attention of folks. Jesus had all four kinds of soils in HIS audience. But he kept on sowing anyway. He didn't try to judge and decide which ones of them would produce...He shared it with all of them. All kinds...even those that looked rocky and shallow and surrounded with thorns.

The point is that when it comes to sowing we don't have the capacity to judge what kind of soil on which we are sowing. We have to leave that to God. Our job is to sow. God's job is to grow.

Notice where this teaching takes place. It says that Jesus left the house and went to the seaside. Jesus gets in a boat and uses the water as a sound system to amplify his voice for the crowd on the shore. From this point on, Jesus would not be welcome in many houses or the synagogues or the temple. He is sowing his message outside the box, outside the normal places where people expected to hear the word of God.

Of course you expect to hear the word of God in sacred places like synagogues and temples and churches. That's why we build them. That's why we've built this place....this Miracle on Main...so there will be a place to gather to hear and to examine and respond to the word of God. But HERE we Gather to Grow, but OUT THERE we're Scattered.....To Sow.

The Word isn't only for in here. It's for out there. It's especially for out there. It's for out there where, in the process of sowing the world WILL land on hard pathways and rocky soil and on soil that is surrounded by thorns AND on good fertile soil that will produce much fruit.

The point is, we cannot judge a book by its cover and we certainly can't judge people by their covers. (but that hasn't stopped some from doing it anyway.) Our job is not to judge... Our job is to sow. and sow and sow-even to the point of someone calling us an "old sow and sow)

If we are faithful in sowing, God will take what we do and will cause the growth. We won't be successful every time. Jesus wasn't successful every time. If he had been he wouldn't have been crucified. It was the hard and rocky and weedy soils that arrested him and put him to death.

So too, as we sow the word of God in our world we will not always see fruit come. Personally, the times I have seen fruit have been from the least likely efforts.

This week I had two wonderful invitations to offer invocations. On Tuesday I prayed the Rotary banquet at the Monument Inn. Of Friday I prayed for the United Way luncheon at Lee College. On Friday, one of the men who was at both made a special effort to find me and thank me for my prayer. He said, "Great prayer pastor. Especially the one on Tuesday night." I've been sowing prayers.

Last night I worked the door for a benefit concert for a local musician who was in a horrible car accident sitting still. She was in her van in a Walmart parking lot. A truck hit another truck that sent it flying in the air and landed on top of her van. She was treated at the hospital and sent home but the next day her brain began to swell and she lost sight in one eye and couldn't talk or walk. They took her back to the get an MRI and she's gotten treatment and she can see and talk again but still has trouble walking. Local musicians gathered for a concert and silent auction and raffle with a goal of raising \$10,000 to help with her expenses. I've been sowing support.

I have given up trying to figure out what kind of fruit is going to come from what I do. I just go and sow. I cannot begin to predict what the Holy Spirit is going to use. But I know that if I don't sow, there's less a chance of the Holy Spirit having something to use than if I do, so I sow.

This is the parable of the sower. It is a parable of encouragement to those who do the sowing--to Jesus' disciples. And to us. It is a parable told to teach them and us that no matter what the response they are to continue to sow. They are not to be discouraged even if 75% of the people don't respond to their efforts. They are not to be discouraged if 75% of those children who came to Vacation Bible School don't come back. We sowed the word. It was heard.

While there were Pharisees who reacted negatively to Jesus message and began to plot to have Jesus killed. There also were Pharisees, like Nicodemus, who came to Jesus one night and heard a message about being Born Again. There was a Pharisee like Joseph of Arimathea who provided the tomb for Jesus to spend the weekend when Jesus died.

There was a boy whose dad died when he was five years old. This boy dropped out of school after the sixth grade. By the time he was 17 he had lost job after job after job. He married at 18, had a baby at 19, and was separated from his wife at 20.

He became a railroad conductor, but he got fired. He joined the Army, but he washed out. He became a farmer and lost his shirt. He applied to law school but got turned down. He became an insurance salesman and couldn't give it away.

Finally, he became a dishwasher and a cook in a two-bit restaurant. One thing he was able to do was to finally persuade his wife to come back to him and together they made a living cooking and washing dishes in this little restaurant. At 65 years of age he retired. He went to the mailbox and got his first Social Security check that had a grand total of \$105. This 65 year old man was so discouraged he decided to commit suicide.

He went under a shade tree, wrote out his last will and testament, determined to end his life. Well, somehow his wife found out about his scheme and confronted him, and said, "Let me tell you one thing you can do, I believe better than anybody I've ever known." He said, "What's that?" She said, "You can cook." He said, "Do you really think so?" She said, "You're fabulous."

Well that gave him an idea. He went down to a local bank and borrowed \$87 dollars against his Social Security check. He went to the supermarket, bought some chicken and some boxes, fried it with a special recipe he had developed on his own, put it in boxes and began going door-to-door in Corbin, Kentucky selling his chicken.

It became so popular he came up with the idea to try to sell it to restaurants. Well, guess what? He was turned down 1,014 times before a man named John Y. Brown tasted his chicken and said, "I'll go into business with you." That man's name was Colonel Harlan Sanders, the founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken. What was the secret? Same man, same recipe, same ability, same chicken. The only difference—a word of encouragement. 2

We are to not be discouraged where our efforts are NOT producing fruit and to instead look to where they are producing fruit. When and where we are faithful, God will bless us with prodigious growth and transforming influence. God can change the soil.

One day in a crowd there was a Pharisee who was the rockiest kind of soil. He held the coats of those who stoned Stephen. But even as he died, Stephen was sowing seeds. Stephen preached about Jesus as he was being stoned to death. On the road to Damascus the seeds Stephen sowed bore fruit and a formerly rocky soil was changed and Saul became Paul.

We all are sowers. Each of us has good news to share. Michael and Alyssa will be going to Slovakia. We'll be going to Walmart. Each of us has a story to tell. Where are we to tell it? Everywhere. We pass the peace in here. We are to sow the seeds out there...at Rotary banquets and Untied Way luncheons and benefit concerts and Walmart parking lots. Each of us has a calling to be sowers because we never know when our seeds will hit home. We're called to sow and sow, SO THAT.... Those OUT THERE can come IN HERE and join us and get in on the joys of being those who go OUT THERE and sow and sow and sow and sow and sow. In the spirit of the parable of the Crazy Sower.

Let's pray,

Dear Lord, let not our hearts be discouraged. Help us to look more where we see fruit coming than where we don't. Don't let us give up when things get tough. Remind us that the watering and the tilling and the fertilizing and the sunshine are up to you. That if we are faithful to do our part that you will do your part.

Thank you for each person you have brought here. I thank you for the ones that have been planted in this fellowship. I pray that we will all grow and that we will produce the kind of fruit befitting our calling.

We pray for the places where bombs explode and rockets launch and Jacob and Esau still fight. We pray for the places where those in the part of the family of God that follow Jesus fight and split and sue and hurt one another. May the words Jesus sowed take root in our lives especially and may we love one another as we have been loved by you, Jesus. May we reach out to others with the same kind of compassion that you showed to outcasts, to widows, to street people, to Gentiles, to singles, to refugees, to little children. to those who are hard, who are snatched away, and who are being choked by thorns as well as those who are glad to see us.

1 and 2 How to Rub People the Right Way ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., Collected Sermons, by James Merritt