

Last September we started reading the Bible at the beginning in Genesis and moved chronologically through the Old Testament. Jesus was born at Christmas and on December 27 we started reading the Gospel of Mark. We will continue reading Mark until Easter. After Easter we'll move to Acts and 2 Corinthians. Right now we are in the first section of Mark: Jesus teaching with parables (stories) and miracles. This section also highlights the disciples' failure to understand what Jesus is doing and what Jesus is about.

Mark 4:1-34

My favorite parable is the Parable of the Sower. It connects with my farming roots in North Dakota, but it isn't a good example of how to farm. Seeds are very expensive, so the good farmer is very conservative about how he or she uses the seeds; you prepare the soil, you are careful about placing the seeds at the proper depth and with the proper spacing. That is why I refer to this as the Parable of the Crazy Farmer—it's crazy to throw seed to the wind.

When we hear parables, or stories or analogies they work or teach us because we place ourselves in the story and in parables we place God in the stories. Where we place God tells us something about how God functions or who God is. As we listen we often place ourselves in Jesus' shoes, "Yah those disciples, why don't they get it." We think we know what the parable is saying. What happens if we are hearing a parable wrong? What if the parables are meant to disrupt us. Often when I have heard the

Parable of the Sower—I heard "be good soil" but soil can't choose; road is road, rocks are rocks, soil is soil.

What if the reality of this parable is that we are all the different types of soil at different times; sometimes we are road, rock and good soil. We can pray to be good soil, but the reality is we are all. Does that change what we understand or learn from the parable? Listen again thinking of God as the crazy farmer and we are all the different types of soil and wondering "what does the seed represent?"

"God sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

What does the seed represent? What does this parable tell us about God and the Kingdom of God?

I wonder if parables only make sense in light of the resurrection—knowing that Jesus has risen from the dead. This could be why the disciples have such a hard time understanding. For us Jesus has risen, but at the same time the Kingdom of God has not yet fully come, the Kingdom of God isn't what surrounds us in our daily lives or on the nightly news. Martin Luther King Jr still has a dream that has not been fully realized. We, like the disciples, struggle to understand what the Kingdom of

God would look like in our lives. In the parables Jesus is explaining the kingdom, using partial pictures—like a diamond. A diamonds full beauty comes as we turn it and look at it indifferent lights, we need to turn these parables and look at them in the different lights of our different days and locations. What is this parable telling me about the Kingdom of God in my work, home, community and congregation.

What if we listen to the Parable of the Crazy Farmer thinking we are the farmer and God is the one promising the harvest. Is the parable telling us, that when we go out sowing the seeds of the Kingdom (love, joy, peace, justice), that we shouldn't concern ourselves with whether or not these seeds are falling on good soil? God promises there will be a harvest. God produces the harvest.

Last week I was talking with Arne Kolbjornsen. Arne is headed to the Dominican Republic later this week on a Mission Trip. He is a dentist and while there he will be fixing people's teeth. I asked him to think about these parables in the light of his upcoming mission trip and Arne is going to share what he saw...

(Arne shared...)

Thanks Arne. What Arne's story does is turn the diamond of the Mustard Seed parable. His story gives us another way of looking at the Kingdom of God through the parable. But his story does something else...

"The Kingdom of God is like a man going on a trip to help people he doesn't know. He doesn't discriminate or choose who he will see; anyone with need is welcome to come in and he will fix their smile." Arne's story is a parable. The Bible is filled with the wonderful stories of Jesus, that allow us to see the amazing love of God, but Jesus isn't finished. God continues to work in our world, in our everyday lives telling parables in the events unfolding around us and through us. Yes, we see God most clearly in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in Jesus' words in the Bible but we also see God unfolding around us. That's why we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.— he worked to create parables, to show us what the Kingdom of God is like. He worked and prayed that he would be good soil and that the world around him would be good soil open to the seed of God's love.

What parables are continuing to unfold in our world? Remembering that at times parables disrupt us. I wonder where will you catch a glimpse of the Kingdom of God this week? Where will you see God working in the world?