

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Whether we are a farmer or a home gardener whenever we plant a seed in the soil, we express our hope for something that we cannot see. Farmers hope that the rain will come at the right time, that disease will not prevent the seed's growth, and that it will produce a good harvest. Home gardeners hope that the birds or snails don't eat what has been planted and frost does not kill the young plants. Sometimes our hopes are not fulfilled, but sometimes they are fulfilled in ways that we could not imagine. I think there is something of that in today's gospel reading.

It might be best to see our reading in three parts: the parable itself, what Jesus says about why he teaches in parables, and the interpretation of this particular parable.

I can imagine all the farmers nodding their heads as Jesus tells the parable of the sower planting his seed. They know that if the seed falls onto the edge of the path, or onto the rocks or among the thorn bushes then it will not produce the crop that the sower intended. But what made them sit up and notice was when Jesus said that the seed that fell on good soil would produce a crop of thirty or sixty or even a hundredfold. What kind of a seed could that be?

But in his wisdom, that is where Jesus leaves his hearers. He tells them a story that they can wonder about. He invites them to ask what this story could mean? This is the beginning of the second section of the gospel. The disciples ask Jesus why he always teaches in parables. Underneath their question they might be asking Jesus, "Why don't you tell us things straight out?" Why do you force us to think about things and come to understand what they mean only after prayer and reflection?"

Jesus wants us all to understand that parables are invitations to understand the truth. They are invitations to come to know Jesus. Jesus uses parables to give us the freedom to come to understand and accept or reject what he wants to share with us. For some people a parable will only ever be a nice story. For other people a parable will be an excuse not to understand and accept the message that Jesus is offering to them. But for those of us who have been called to follow Jesus, a parable is a beautiful invitation to come to a deeper understanding of what Jesus calls us to hear. Every parable will only be a nice story for us until we have asked the question, "What could this story be saying to me?" "Where could I be in this story that I am hearing?"

It is likely that Jesus himself did not explain the parable of the sower to his disciples. What we read in the gospel may have been the prayerful reflection of the gospel

writer upon the parable. If Jesus did explain the parable himself, I like to think of it as being an example of how every parable needs to be interpreted. The disciples of Jesus are often described as being slow learners. They seemed to take such a long time to understand who Jesus was and what he was about. I can imagine them being like that here. Jesus takes pity on them and says, this is what I am trying to say to you. And so he goes through the interpretation that we read in the gospel.

But even after we have understood what the parable might mean, we still have to ask ourselves, “Where am I in this parable?” Am I on the rocks? Am I like those people who hear the Word and get enthusiastic for a while, and then find it is all too hard? Or am I in the thorn bushes? Am I like the people who allow the attractions of the world around me distract me from listening to the Word that Jesus is speaking to me? Or am I part of the good soil? Am I trying my best to be attentive to God’s Word and allow it to produce the harvest that God intends? I would like to think that this is where we are.

But even if we cannot think of ourselves as being particularly good soil, what we need to remember is that Jesus is talking about himself as the seed that is planted deep within our hearts. That seed is the Word made flesh for us. It is Jesus himself who produces the abundant

harvest in in us. All He needs from us is a heart that is open and ready for him. All he needs is our cooperation with his desire to produce thirty, sixty or even a hundredfold within us.

Now it becomes not so much, “what does Jesus want us to understand through this parable?”, but rather, “What does Jesus want us to do, or more correctly, allow Him to do through this parable?” Jesus wants to be planted deep within us so that He can share his love with us. Jesus wants to be the creative word at work in us, helping us to grow into the happy resourceful people that that we long to be. And it is from Jesus, living within us, that the love comes to bear fruit, to be creative, to produce the harvest that Jesus intends.

The hope that the sower has when he plants his seed, is the hope that Jesus has for us. And Jesus invites us to share in that hope, and to be surprised at what He can do in love through you and me.