

## *Tilling Good Soil*

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Susan S. Izard

July 12, 2020

---

Our scripture this morning is the Parable of the Sower. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea to teach. There were so many people there to listen to his teachings that he had to go into the water and sit in a boat while the crowd stood on the beach. From that perch, Jesus told the parable. One day a sower went out to sow and some seeds fell on the path. Birds came and picked them up. Seeds fell – some on rocky ground, and when they sprang up quickly the plants were scorched by the sun because they didn't have any roots. Others seeds fell among thorns and when they grew up, the thorns choked them. More seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. The parable ends when Jesus says: "Let anyone with ears listen!"

It is interesting to note that the Gospel goes on to explain how the parable equates to people of faith. Scripture explains: Anyone who hears the word of the kingdom and doesn't understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart. It is like the seeds sown on the path. The seeds sown on rocky ground are like those who hear the word and immediately know its joy, but have no roots so they endure for a little while but when there is trouble or persecution on account of the word, they immediately fall away. The seeds that fall on thorns are like ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word and yields nothing. But for the person who is like the seeds that fall on good soil, this one hears and understands the word bearing fruit and yielding, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.

The image of good soil is a wonderful metaphor for us - how are we tilling the good soil of our souls? How can we let the seeds of our hearts be nurtured in good soil so that they bear fruit?

This past spring, I put in a new garden bed. Two of our trees died last fall so there is now a new, sunny spot for a flower bed along the side of a stone wall. After pulling away old planting, I needed to turn over the hard dirt and add lots and lots of deep rich compost to the soil before planting in order for the flowers to have the best possible soil to grow in. I'll have to do that again for a number of years for the soil become as healthy as possible.

Prayer, worship, bible study, reading, sharing conversation around our faith, learning to listen for the movement of God among us are all ways of digging compost into our souls. As people of faith, we are invited to cultivate expansive, softened receptive hearts. This inner work or quiet time allows for spaciousness to arise for God's story to root in us. It is the yeast of our faith, so to speak.

The other day I was talking with a young man who is very busy with his work as a director of a food ministry and as a first responder. Even before Covid-19 he was busy, but at the beginning of March his life got even busier. At one point as he was rushing to care for another crisis he heard the words: "You have got to find a way to be quiet." He believed the message came from God. Knowing that he was not the kind of person to take 15, 20 or 30 minutes each morning for quiet, he arranged for a few of his friends to meet once a week on Zoom for a time of evening prayer. Together they listened to music, read scripture and prayers, sat in silence and shared their reflections. These gathering became an anchor and life-giving presence for him.

Caring for the compost of our souls through this inner work is how the roots of God's love will land us on good soil. Once that is done we can seek ways to care for God's world.

The other day a friend sent me a short article by a Dominican Sister, Ardeth Platte, O.P. For the past three years she has lived at the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker House in Washington, D.C. where she created a large garden on the east side of the building turning the soil over by shovel. This is the first year she has been there every day working in the garden during early morning and late afternoon hours. Just as her community had to isolate themselves because of the pandemic in early March, she began to plant a large quantity of seeds – lettuce, kale, collard and mustard greens, carrots, beets, radishes, peas, beans, peppers, tomatoes, squash, eggplant, zucchini and more! Over the months of isolating people would walk by the garden and admire. Keeping a distance, she greets them and asks them what they would like and she picks it for them. The garden feeds the large community that she lives with. On Wednesday mornings it is open for people in need. She fills boxes of all kinds with what is ready to be harvested and people come for their fresh vegetables. She feeds the doctors who live next door and parish priests. It is her way of sharing the bounty of God's earth. Her article ends with these words:

*This is my resistance in this type of cloister in protecting others and being protected,  
always masked in presence with others and keeping distance.  
God is so good and is truly the Provider.  
And I am really grateful being Her gardener.*

This is the invitation from our scripture this morning – as people of faith we are invited to nurture the soil of our souls and share the fruits of our blossoming with God's world. May God be with us on the journey. Amen.

© 2020, Susan Izard

First Church West Hartford  
12 South Main Street  
West Hartford, CT 06107