

For the next few weeks we will be hearing the parables of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew. Parables are very memorable and so we'll recognize most of them when we hear them. And, oh Jesus, some of your stories make perfect sense to me, and some of them seem quite obtuse.

In most cases, Jesus used simple items or activities that were familiar to the people of his day. In an agrarian society, planting seeds is one of the most ubiquitous jobs for a family and a community. Everyone knew and understood the planting of seeds.

For us who live in the countryside, we too are pretty familiar with planting seeds in the spring. At home I have one of those broadcast spreaders that you walk behind. As you push it and the tires roll along, a little rotating disk broadcasts grass seed widely and all I have to do is walk carefully, not straying from side to side in my path. If I accidentally veer too much to one side the seed will be broadcast onto the driveway and that creates a little minor disaster.

Jesus keeps the telling of his parable in pretty simple terms. He doesn't go into details like what happens if you spread too much seed in one spot – then everything sprouts, and because there's too much seed and no soil, it all dies. Jesus doesn't address the necessity of rain in his parable. You can spread all the seed you want but if it never receives water, the seeds won't sprout no matter how good the soil is.

Another issue not addressed is re-seeding. Our lawns and fields often need no more seed because the plants themselves produce seed and, with time and water the seeds mature on the grass or flowers or alfalfa and they seed themselves.

Jesus does mention that a bird may come along and eat the seed. But he doesn't say that some seeds are adapted to go through the digestive system of a bird and then, when excreted later on they have natural fertilizer attached to them. That's kind of an interesting twist to imagine in this parable.

Now I know, I'm complicating matters that Jesus sought to keep simple. Jesus said to the large crowd that gathered near on the shore, "Listen!" And when we listen it leads to thinking and wondering. I am sure Jesus meant us to have parables be the start of conversations, not the end of them. Meditating on this parable just naturally brings up thoughts such as these and more!

This parable, and the many others that Jesus told, were meant to make clear how God wishes to communicate to us, be with us, to support and love us. Parables also help to clarify difficult and thorny issues. God sends the seeds of hope and compassion, acceptance and love into our complicated lives; lives that are now full of worries about disease and hard conversations about civil rights and discrimination.

We see **ourselves** as the good earth which receives the Word of God from Jesus, it takes root in us and grows. The seed which is the Good News is that we are beloved children. All God's children are **equally** in God's sight. And God's hope for each and every one of us is health, freedom and happiness, what is also called salvation.

What Jesus goes on to say about the seeds planted in good soil is that they bear fruit. This is a favorite way that Jesus has to express what it is to be good soil. We are to bear fruit. If the Good News planted in us, if it grows and matures then it must also come to completion of the growing cycle. We cannot keep the gifts of grace that we have been so freely given to ourselves. We must share them to be part of the Kingdom of God. In effect, we must re-seed like the lawns and the fields do.

I will add, though, that we must have sunlight and rain. For the seed parable to come to its fruition (to be blessed and then be a blessing) we have to have enough sunlight and rain to make God's Word grow.

Sometimes adversity, however, also makes the seed grow. In the life cycle of a plant, of good rain and bright sun, there may come a time of disaster, either drought, or flood or fire. And each plant's seeds make adaptations over generations to be able to either withstand these trials and tribulations, or to allow the next generation of the plant to do so.

There are plants whose seeds float easily in a flood and then become the first to find soil and sprout after the waters have receded. There are plants that go into hibernation when there is a drought and seem to all appearances to be dead, only to come back to life when rain finally appears. And then there are those remarkable plants that make seeds that are only released and able to germinate after a fire comes through: the lodgepole pine, and the eucalyptus are examples of trees that fire activates. Their cones or seeds are completely sealed with resin.

So to extend the parable that Jesus told, just a bit, we might look at our own lives and see how perhaps God's word was delivered to us in sealed seeds that only were able to take root in us after a great tragedy, or a difficult episode of suffering in our lives.

Jesus would have wanted to have us take his simple parable and think further on it...or see how it could be expanded to comprehend each one of our lives. How have God's seeds of love

and hope and freedom taken root in you? How has that seed also required sunlight, and gentle rain and even fire to bring to life the Good News in your heart?

Parables are meant to give us clarity and understanding. Parables are meant to enlighten and make concrete the Spiritual Life. We need things to touch and to see. Jesus gives us this mystery of Holy Communion to touch and to see (spiritually when necessary) so that we may make the invisible visible to our eyes and in our hearts. Holy Communion, may be just the sunlight and gentle rain that we need to let the Good News of Jesus take root, grow and blossom in us.