

Pastor Jonna Bohigian
Scatter the Seed!
 Luke 8:4 – 15

Dear friends in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“I just don’t know what happened.” She looked at me with longing eyes, this *deep* sadness. “She grew up in a Christian home and now she says that she’s not a Christian. I just *don’t know* what could have happened. I cling to the verse in Proverbs that says, “Train up a child in the way [they] should go, and when [they are] old, [they] will not depart from it” (Prov 22:6).

This mom’s sadness is one that *many* of us carry, whether it is a child, a friend, or someone else close to us. And it often doesn’t make sense, why one has a deep faith and another couldn’t reject Jesus more strongly.

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus has begun his ministry, called twelve to be his closest disciples, and even more have followed him and supported his ministry. Luke 8 refers to women who risk their reputations and share their wealth to support Jesus’ and the Twelve’s ministry. In a culturally shocking way, these women have become Jesus’ disciples too, and follow his itinerant ministry. This ministry has become quite the movement, really. Crowds gather to see Jesus, to be healed by him, and to hear what he might say. Some travel a fair distance, just to catch a glimpse!

With everyone gathered around, Jesus begins to teach. “A farmer went out to sow his seed...some fell on the path...some fell on rock...other seed fell among thorns...still other seed fell on good soil.” The seed on the path, rock, and thorns did not survive, but the seed that fell on the good soil produced a crop, a hundred times more than what was sown. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Lk 8:5 – 8).

Jesus’ disciples, perhaps in their confidence of knowing him, ask what it means. This story is more than what meets the eye, but what? What does this story, this parable, *mean*?

Since our Bibles are blocked into chapters, sections, and verses, we miss things sometimes. In many of our Bibles, the section entitled “The Parable of the Sower” ends at verse 15, so we naturally stop reading there. What is interesting is that verse 16 continues with Jesus telling another parable, and verse 19 saying that Jesus’ mother and brothers come to see him, but they are unable to get near him because of the *crowd*.

In our story, Jesus has not gone *anywhere*, nor has the crowd. So when Jesus’ disciples ask him what the parable of the sower and the soils means, the crowd is still there. Jesus is not having a private conversation with his disciples; he is having a conversation with *everyone* listening.

This is something that I just *love* about Scripture. There is plenty that is not obvious, so the more you explore, the more you see and understand!

What is happening here between Jesus and the disciples is kind of like what happens during worship services. I have heard adults say *more than once* that they learned more during the children’s message than during the sermon. Perhaps the children’s messages simply *are* better, but I believe that there is something *else* that is also happening here. Children’s messages are *supposed* to be for children. So what happens when a message is supposed to be for someone else? The person overhearing sometimes gets more out of it than the person to whom it was intended! This kind of teaching happens *plenty* during Jesus’ ministry.

Jesus’ disciples ask him what this parable means in front of the *entire crowd*, and Jesus says, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in

parables, so that, ‘though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand’” (Lk 8:10). And he proceeds to explain the parable.

But hasn't *everyone* just heard a secret of the kingdom of God? Who are the “others” that only hear parables? Here, the *crowd* even hears the explanation. So what at first seems *exclusive* to his disciples is now perhaps *not* so exclusive.

Let's continue. Jesus says, “This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop” (Lk 8:11 – 15).

Jesus describes a farming process that is *not* similar to ours. The farmer does *not* first till the soil, take out the rocks and impediments, or spare his seed for only what he *knows* is good soil. The farmer *broadcasts* it, and it lands on all kinds of ground, like this picture. (picture) Jesus seems to indicate that the *farmer* doesn't even know which is the good soil. The good soil seems to prove that it is good soil only *after* it perseveres and produces a crop.

As we hear this parable, it frankly sounds *wasteful*. Why would a farmer not first prepare the ground and ensure that he doesn't waste seeds? What's fascinating is that Jesus seems unconcerned. So maybe the farmer *is* wasteful. Who's to know and who's to care? The seed that *does* fall on good soil produces a bountiful harvest, a hundred times *more* than what was sown.

This is what happens in the kingdom of God. The word is shared, scattered. *Many* won't produce fruit, but *some* will produce *much* fruit.

The effect of this parable likely serves as both an *encouragement* and a *discouragement*. For those who *ache* for loved ones to come to the faith, the unpredictability of this sowing process may be discouraging. It's tempting to look for a formula to guarantee success, to look for just the *right* way to share your faith so that they *will* come to faith and that their faith *will* last. But this passage doesn't offer a formula, nor does any other passage in Scripture. Faith is simply not formulaic.

And the encouragement is that it's *not* formulaic. There are *many* ways people come to faith and many stories for why people have persevered in the faith. So we can be creative. We don't have to say or do just the right thing. We can be ourselves. We can share our hobbies, our stories, our struggles, the people that we want to be, and the love that we have for our friends. We may wait a long time for an open door to talk about faith, or it may come sooner than we think. The reality is, we will often fail, and at times we will be *terrible* witnesses to the good news of Jesus. So, as with everything else, we approach our friends in humility, confessing when we have overstepped, recognizing that we have a long way to grow.

A dear friend of mine gave me permission to share her story. When my friend was a preteen, she became a Christian and joined a friend at her local church. For 6 years, she was a dedicated part of this church. Her family was not Christian, so she came to the church alone. Many in the church recognized this, and began to ask why she came alone. Why was her family not Christian? She must not be a good enough witness to her family if they were not becoming Christians. She continually heard the message that she, and everyone else, were terrible people. She fell into a deep depression. She would often cry during worship services, and congregants *affirmed* her tears, believing that she was being moved by the Spirit. There is more to her complicated relationship with the church, but as you might suspect, when she turned 18, she left the church.

It is amazing what people will share with you when you ask. Some people's faith stories are *not* so mysterious as we might think they are. Many have been deeply hurt by the church and by individual Christians and have not recovered.

In our attempts to be "good Christian witnesses," many of us have overstepped and deeply hurt our friends and family. In our concern for their salvation, we have treated them less as friends and more as "projects."

Please hear that I am not trying to point the finger; I have done this myself, and even *with* the friend I just told you about. I have acted in hubris, carrying the thought that as a friend, I am responsible for her salvation. I have been impatient and have pushed conversations that she did not appreciate. Being convicted of my arrogance, I have confessed to her how I should have treated her better. I am thankful for her forgiveness and ashamed of my arrogance.

Perhaps the most important conviction of Jesus' parable is this: the outcome of someone's faith – or lack thereof – is *not* dependent upon you. You are entirely *unable* to change someone's heart. You are unable to change someone else's heart, just as much as you are unable to change your own. Heart change is not up to you. It's in the hands of someone who doesn't rush and is infinitely more trustworthy than either you or me. Heart change is in the hands of the Holy Spirit *alone*.

So do we just sit back in our recliner and remain silent? Of *course* not. You and I have *no idea* the part that we will play in someone else's faith journey.

One of my role models is my husband, Alek. I continue to be amazed with how he naturally shares about faith, is honest about the shortcomings of the church, and shares by the invitation of the *other* person. A year ago, Alek was at a bachelor party for a friend from college. He was the only Christian there, and a pastor at that. He didn't expect to speak about his faith at this secular weekend. Surprisingly, nearly *every* person wanted to talk to him about faith and what his job entailed as a pastor. He had to laugh, as God used a *bachelor party* as an avenue to witness.

So as you wait for the Spirit's timing to share, pray. Pray for those who are heavy on your heart. Pray that you might be a good friend, a friend who *listens* well and honors your friend's journey. Remember: it is *not your job* to change hearts. So listen. And humbly wait for opportunities to share.

In a recent Barna study, U.S. adults said that the number 1 person they would prefer to have a spiritual conversation with was a friend - not a pastor, a stranger, or anyone else.¹ So *be* a friend – one who loves, listens, prays, speaks honestly, and doesn't condition your friendship on how soon – or if – your friend becomes a Christian. It's not up to you.

So pay attention and humbly *scatter* the seed, on what looks like bad soil and what looks like good soil, and watch what the Spirit does! Because the Spirit *will* produce a crop a hundred times more than what was sown! Glory be to God! Amen.

¹ Don Everts, *The Reluctant Witness*, 70.