

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany - February 4, 2024

Mark 4:1–20

“Seeds and Soil”

1. I'd like to speak just to the children for a moment, if the adults could please just give us a little privacy (you don't have to plug your ears, just focus on something else for a moment)
 - a. Ok, kids. I think no one else is listening now.
 - b. So, you may not know it, but I was a little kid like you once upon a time, a long time ago
 - c. And as a kid I liked to be part of conversations that adults were having, like my relatives
 - d. Sometimes, that annoyed them. Especially my sisters. That ALWAYS annoyed them
 - e. My two sisters are 10 and 12 years older than me.
 - f. I thought (and I still think) that they're very cool and part of me wanted to be like them, because they were part of a special group I REALLY wanted to be a part of.
 - i. They belonged to the adult choir in church. That may sound boring to you, maybe, but that choir got to travel to sing in cool places, and they had fun parties, and they did all sort of neat things.
 - ii. But you had to be a member of the choir. You had to be a grown up.
 - iii. I knew I wasn't a grown up. Of course. But every chance I got, I tried to sneak my way in.
 - iv. Obviously they noticed. Here is this 10 year old kid, this 4th grader, trying to hang out with these 20 year olds, these college kids. Yeah, they noticed.
 - g. One time, my sisters threw a party for their choir friends at our house.
 - i. Oh boy, I thought! I can be at the party. Yeah, no. My sisters made it clear that I wasn't invited to be there.
 - ii. I could come eat from what they had for dinner (and that only because mom put her foot down), but then I had to go back to my room. Away from the fun.
 - iii. But I had a plan: I'd be near enough that I could eavesdrop on their conversations, and their jokes, and their music. Even from a distance.
 - h. See, what adults don't know (don't worry, they're not really listening) is that as kids, we listen to EVERYTHING! That's especially true when they don't think we're listening.
 - i. Anyways, I tell you all of this because today's story of Jesus made me think about that.
 - i. It's about kind of like listening when no one thought we were.
 - ii. The farmer was ultimately surprised when some seed sprung up and grew
 - iii. It's just that he may not have really known which soil was going to be good – so he scattered seed all over and hoped for the best.
 - iv. And like that, adults should feel hopeful that we are all listening and we will surprise them by really understanding even when no one thought we were old enough or smart enough to understand.
 - j. Anyway, I think you can tell that the adults are getting restless, so I gotta go back to talk to them as well. Nice chat

2. Welcome back, adults. Thanks for your patience.
 - a. In today's story, there are several aspects or characters we can focus on
 - i. We can focus on the sower, who looks like he may not have much power over whether the seeds grow
 - ii. Or the seed, which you wonder if it's valuable or not: I worry that it's being scattered so haphazardly!
 - iii. Or the types of soil, which make me wonder if they are set once and forever in that condition (rocky/weedy/good)
 - b. As Jesus explains it, this parable is about how the word of God, the meaning of the message of God's love, can get an uneven reception.
 - i. And, if we think about the sower and the seed, that could make the story feel like a sad story – so much seed is wasted, eaten, scorched or choked!
 - ii. But what I think Jesus is saying is that it's worth it to share the word of God, the meaning of God's love, as widely and as freely as possible, because we can never be certain where the fruit will come from
 1. Growth in fact will come from unexpected places and it will be so surprising!
 2. And just when you think you know who will take to heart the message of love, then out of nowhere comes a response from someone we didn't even know was paying attention!
 - iii. That is a hopeful understanding of this parable, which I think corresponds with the hopeful way in which God never gives up on us humans, and with the hopeful way in which Jesus went to people everyone else had given up on
 - iv. Think of the flip side: How difficult it would be to hear of a sower that neglects certain patches of their land, only concentrating on the prime spots to do all their work!
 - v. I'm glad God freely offers God's love all over, with the hopeful expectation that we will bear fruit, we will live by and share God's love!
 - c. Which brings me to a final thought:
 - i. We all could stand to do some yardwork.
 - ii. The seed is eager to grow. It's ready to grow!
 - iii. All the soil is receptive, ultimately. It's just that other things can get in the way of that fertile soil
 - iv. If the full parable represents my whole life, maybe there have been times when rocky personal challenges, or choking work demands, or other things have kept the soil of my life be as productive as it could be.
 - v. Maybe you and I, here in church, are weeding that fertile spot, or raking out some of the rocks, so that we invest internationally on how we receive God's love, and then how we prepare to share it!

Reflection questions:

1. Share a story of when a loved one told you that something you said years earlier really made an impact in them (and you may not even remember saying that to them!)

2. Why is Jesus often speaking in parables? And why would he explain THIS one in Mark 4:1–20 about the sower, the seeds and soils (he didn't always explain them)?
3. What kind of soil am I right now? Does it change?

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/parables-in-mark-2/commentary-on-mark-41-34-4>