

Waste of Time(?)

I'm no farmer, but plain old common sense tells me that if I want seed to grow and produce a good crop, I should probably sow that seed into good soil. Sowing seed in an oil-stained, sun-scorched busy Walmart parking lot isn't going to do me any good. And at first glance, that seems to be the message of the parable in our Gospel lesson. Only the seed that fell in the good soil produced a good crop. Everything else failed. *So... there you go. If you want a good crop, sow the seeds into good soil.* Everything else is a waste of time, right? It's a waste of time, effort, and resource. Bringing the parable to fruition (no pun intended), it stands to reason that if you want good Christians, sow the seed of the Word to good people. Don't waste the time, the effort, or the resources sowing seed where it obviously won't grow. That's what we tend to hear. In fact, that's what we *prefer* to hear. Well... that's **NOT** at all what your Lord is teaching here. God desires the death of no one, right? No one! He desires that all would hear and take to heart and repent and believe. This is why your Lord would have the seed of His life-giving Word scattered **EVERYWHERE!**

Consider all those different people Jesus interacted with during the three years of His earthly ministry. *Talk about running the gamut, from one extreme to the other!* Jesus met with High Priests and Scribes and Pharisees—the Sanhedrin—the elite of the religiously elite. These guys were the absolute cream of the crop. They weren't just “good.” They were about as *perfect* as you could get on this side of eternity. That's one of the reasons they took such offense at the message of Jesus (and John the Baptist). They were being told to repent?! Repent for what?! If anybody needs to repent, it's the disrespectful fool telling such a good person that they need to repent, as if they're some kind of sinner. They're not like all those “sinners.” At the opposite side of that pendulum swing are the *low-lives and riffraff*; i.e., the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the Samaritans, and every other sort of dreg of society who were “clearly” on God's naughty list. Why bother, right? Look at 'em! *It won't do any good. We're wasting our time.* Besides, they can't do anything for us in return.

Now, knowing what you know, who was the good soil? I know what our own worldly (and fallen) reason tells us. I know what our eyes, our hearts, and our good intentions tell us, but God sees things quite differently, *and thank God that He does!* Now... does that mean that all that seed that fell upon all the other soiled hearts failed? No. **The seed worked, in each and every circumstance.** Don't think only in terms of an abundant harvest of good fruit. The seed that fell upon the hard, concrete hearts of men and was trampled underfoot by their own arrogance and pride did it's job. *It bore a big old crop of nothing.* That seed, sown in abundance on those hearts, revealed the fact that those hearts were hardened. The same goes for all the seed that fell among the rocks as well as the

seed that fell among the thorns/weeds. The crops of nothing revealed the types of soil the good seed was sown into. ***The deadly, damning reality of the soil was exposed.***

I'm reminded of a news story I read just this past Thursday morning. A pastor was invited to give the opening prayer before the state senate/congress in Virginia. In a room packed full of "good" politicians, this faithful pastor didn't wilt or kowtow or try to appease everyone in the room by praying the ***theological equivalence of lukewarm milquetoast***. Instead, he prayed a faithful prayer to God in the midst and the hearing of all. He prayed—out loud—that his God and Father would cause the hearts of ALL in attendance to repent and listen to and follow the ***Word of Truth*** regarding such issues as homosexuality and abortion. ***He dared to use that God-given opportunity to sow the seed of Truth in that place!*** Guess what? That seed bore an abundant harvest of hate. The "good" soil that so many claim to be was exposed by the good seed of the Word to be concrete and closed off and hostile to God. Many a self-proclaimed good Christian wilted under the heat of the spotlight once it was shown on them and they were asked about the situation. Many a self-proclaimed good Christian showed that the seed sown in their hearts had been choked out from the thorns/pleasures of elected life and all the powers/privileges that come with it. They sold out Christ to keep a good thing going. In all these cases the Truth was exposed and laid bare for all to see.

But... take careful note: ***The Good Seed of the Word of God is what exposes and lays bare the different soil realities.*** As God says in/through Isaiah, His Word does not return to Him void or empty. It accomplishes (prosper) in all that it is sent to do. As I was writing this, I was constantly reminded of the passages that speak of ***reaping what you sow*** (ref. Gal 6:7-9). We can/do sow lots of different seed, and we will reap what we sow. Our American culture is proof. Sow the seeds of generic, watered-down, me-centered Christianity, and you will reap a harvest of generic, watered-down, me-centered Christians. Sow the seeds of going to church maybe once every few months (or years), and guess what? Your kids grow up believing that church isn't important, at least not as important as golf or fishing or kids' sports or sleeping in or cleaning the pool. ***You reap what you sow.*** Sow the seeds of glitter and Kool-Aid and play time, and you will reap a harvest of folks who grow up and "mature" who don't hunger and thirst for Word and Sacrament, but who want glitter and Kool Aid and play time. Sow the seeds of promiscuity, and you wind up with a crop of promiscuity. Sow the seeds of perversion and selfishness and disregard for all life, and you wind up with a culture that rejects God's Word on matters pertaining to marriage, sexuality, abortion, and the sanctity of life. You reap what you sow. ***The fruit never seems to fall far from the tree, does it?***

God's Word works, even when things seem like ***impossible, colossal wastes of time.*** Harkening back to the different people that Jesus came into contact with

throughout His earthly ministry, you can see how His Word plowed up and scored open the sinful hearts of some very sinful people. They heard and repented, turning from their wicked ways, turning to Him and holding fast to Him. What appeared to all to be a *colossal waste of time* (because who preaches to hopeless reprobates like prostitutes, tax collectors, and Samaritans), the Holy Spirit went to work, turning sinful hearts into good soil; i.e., those who, upon hearing the Word, held fast to it in honest and good hearts, bearing fruit with patience.

Patience: There's a concept that no one is comfortable with, at least not in terms of ministry. We want to see immediate results. Sow the seed, share the Word, and we expect/want to see a giant beanstalk immediately come shooting up. *It doesn't work that way.* I wish it did, but I'm not the Good Gardener. This is a conversation I have to have with many a person who struggles because their idiot loved ones have turned their backs on God and His means of grace. They want to see an *immediate* turnaround. Pray and speak some Scripture passages to them, get them to come to church, and *—poof!*— they're now hardcore practicing Christians. I always have to break the bad news that God's good seed isn't magic beans that produce a magic beanstalk. Keep sowing the seed. *Maybe/Hopefully something will get through and take root. We leave that to the working of God.* Who knows? It may take the seeds sown at your own funeral to finally get through to them. It may take the good seed sown at your funeral for something to finally take root in their heart and produce the good fruits of repentant faith. (That's why good, God-centered, Christ-eulogizing funerals with good Christ-centered hymnody and Scripture matter!) *You might be sowing the seeds for a tree of faith that you're never going to get to enjoy the shade of.* Who knows? The good seeds you sow today may not take root and bear fruit until they're on their deathbed. It might take that long. I pray that it doesn't, but it might. I'm not the Good Gardener. I sow. Paul plants. Apollos waters. But God is the One who gives growth. Be patient. Let Him work.

God does the work. His Word never fails. It accomplishes all that He purposes, all the time. He does this work in and through His almighty Word; the very Word and Promise that took on flesh and died on that wretched tree for you and for all the sins of all mankind. *"We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly (waste of time) to the Gentiles. But to those who are being saved it is the power of God."* Folks: ***This was NOT and is NOT a waste of time! Look no further than mirror!*** The water and blood that poured forth from His riven side waters you and nurtures you and gives you His abundant life, even today. His tree—His tree alone—produces and bears the abundant fruits of everlasting life. God died for you. God spared nothing for you and your salvation. ***You are not a waste of time to God, nor is anyone else created in His image; anyone else whom Christ shed His blood for.***

May this precious seed of God's Gospel Word take root in your heart and spring up to bear abundant fruits of repentance and thanksgiving; thanksgiving that can't help but bear God-pleasing fruit in all that you say, think, and do. May this Word—the Word made flesh and hung on the tree to die; *the tree of death that was made into the tree of Life by the blood of Christ Himself*—may this Word grant you peace and comfort and assurance all your remaining days. **AMEN.**