

Don't Plant Seeds in a Rock Garden

Luke 8:5-15

“A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.” As he said this, he called out, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that ‘looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand.’ “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.

You gotta love it when Jesus tells us a parable, then gives us the explanation. It makes things so much easier, doesn't it? The parable we read this morning is a favorite for many people – probably in large part because Jesus does give us ‘the answer.’ Jesus tells us that a farmer goes out to plant his seeds. Now since Jesus doesn't tell us this is the dumbest or worst farmer ever, I imagine his plan was to sow all of the seed in the good soil. After all, any farmer worth his or her salt knows that the harvest will be greatest if the seeds are planted well. That's why farmers spend so long preparing the ground before they even get out the seeds.

Nevertheless, some of the seeds end up on subprime soil. Jesus says the seeds fell on the path, the rock, and among the thorns. He doesn't say the farmer intentionally planted it there. In my mental image of this story, the farmer has a large cotton sack of seed. The bag is sewed up the sides, but there's a small tear along the seam. So as the farmer walks out to the field where he intends to plant, some of the seed spills out the side. And apparently between the barn and the field, there is a path, a rocky area, and a patch of thorns.

Jesus goes on to explain to us exactly what those kinds of soil represent. And Jesus says we are the soil. But even when Jesus spells out for us the details of a parable, I still think there

are multiple ways to understand. The very reason Jesus told stories, instead of giving direct lessons, is because stories contain so many layers. They are able to contain multiple truths and still be meaningful across time, distance and culture.

So what if we read this a little different this morning? Instead of picturing yourself as one of the kinds of soil, I want us to put ourselves in the place of the farmer this morning. In my interpretation today, instead of being dirt, you get to be a person. And instead of thinking of the seeds as the word of God, imagine that each seed is a fraction of your time. The four kinds of soil represent the ways you can spend your time. Some of our time falls on the path – where we have little control of it. People trample it; birds eat it. Sometimes other people almost steal our time from us, and we feel like we have to do things, even if we really don't want to. Some of our time falls on the rocks – where it is completely unproductive. I don't need to explain that any further, do I? We all know what it is to spend time just vegging out, doing nothing. Some of our time falls among the thorns – where it appears at first that it will grow. We feel like we are doing something productive, but we are frenetically doing just for the sake of doing. We choke ourselves out with our own busyness. Even when it's something we like to do, we end up stressing ourselves out so much we wonder whether it's worth it anymore. Finally, some of our time is planted in good soil – where it is productive. Good things happen because of how we spend this time.

Now just like the farmer in the parable, most of the time, we don't intend to waste our seeds of time. We don't intentionally plant our seeds in poor soil. But sometimes we aren't paying attention. A few minutes here, an hour or two there... At the end of a day or a month sometimes we look back and wonder where all our time went. And sometimes, we do have to make choices. We budget our time, knowing that sometimes in the long run, it's best if we let

some our time fall astray. At work, you might let a boss's project take some time away from your own task. As long as you don't sow too many seeds on the rocks, it can be a good thing to have down time and to relax and veg out. But for the most part, we want to use our time wisely. We want to live meaningful lives, and that happens when we are intentional about how we spend our time.

There are lots of activities that are nourishing, helpful, positive ways to spend your time. But I'm only going to mention one this morning, because I think it's that important. I'm going to say this out loud, directly, so clearly you can't mistake my message. I think Christian education is critical – both for kids and adults. Sunday school for our kids is one of the best things we offer. Where else, for one hour a week, can you encourage a young person to develop social skills, grow deeper in their faith, build compassion, learn to apply their faith to daily living, and find meaning and purpose for their lives? What an amazing gift we have to give!

Vacation Bible School and summer camp offer the same great opportunities, but they give us the chance to tweak and strengthen what we do. Vacation Bible School goes for a week – so kids are more likely to remember from one day to the next. It gives us a chance to string together a few lessons to create a bigger picture for them. And that intensifies at camp, because kids live together in intentional Christian community, 24 hours a day, for a week.

Of course, it's August, so camp and VBS are done for the summer. But you don't have to wait until next year to be part of Christian education. Sunday school for our kids starts September 12. I'll be offering adult classes throughout the fall as well. And adults can experience the power of intentional Christian community with our women's and men's retreats, coming up in the middle of September.

I know your lives are busy. In the last year, learning how to juggle having a baby with the rest of my busy schedule, I have come to appreciate in a whole new way how busy life can be. But we have some important choices to make about how we spend our time. Christian education – as Sunday school, adult classes, retreats, camp, or VBS – is a formational and foundational way to improve our relationship with God and create meaningful and purposeful lives.

And if I haven't managed to convince you yet, you don't have to take my word for it. Let's look at the pictures from last week. (Watch slide show) Amen and amen.