

15th Sunday of Ordinary Time/July 13, 2014

Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23;

Rev. Joel M. Krueger

"Planting Our Garden"

(Before the sermon I take off my robe and am dressed in overalls and t-shirt, bare feet, a hat, and holding a hoe)

"Inch by inch, row by row, gonna make this garden grow . . ."

Good morning folks, Farmer Joe here to talk a bit about plantin' seeds.

It seems our Lord, the good shepherd, who was a trained carpenter, also knew somethin' about farmin'.

You know, when he taught, he often spoke in parables, stories that people could picture, things they could relate with and things that invited them to listen and to keep thinkin' about.

Often he would start one of these parables with the word *"Listen!"* I like that. Because he was givin' them a warning that what he was about to say was important and that they needed to pay attention. It was also an invitation. When Jesus said *"Listen!"* he was inviting them to open up not only their ears, but also their minds and their hearts, because the things he said to them were things that could change their whole lives!

Likewise, he would often end the parable with the words, *"He who has ears, let him hear!"* I think that was a way of him just sayin' to folks, there is more to understand here than just the words. Think about it!

And you know, there were lots of folks then, in those days, as I suppose there are still today, who didn't really listen and who didn't want to hear what he had to say. And that's kind of what he was talkin' about in today's scripture.

You see, there were lots of folks who weren't likin' what Jesus was sayin'. We know that some of the Pharisees and other religious people were not with him in all this *"Kingdom of God"* stuff he was talkin' about. But there were others too. Plenty of folks who didn't want to change their lives in the ways he was saying they needed to. And if you look close at the words in the chapter before this one and at the end of it, you can see situations where that is the case. You have people in opposition to Jesus, even to the point that in his own home town they rejected him.

So it's not surprisin' that Jesus needed to tell this parable to explain to his disciples why some folks seem to get it and some don't. And here's where I can help shed some light.

The parable of the Sower is interesting because it has the sower sowin' seeds just about everywhere. *"Inch by inch, row by row, gonna make this garden grow."*

He sows the seed all over the place, not just on some soil that he's prepared, that he's dug up and fertilized and gotten ready. No, no, no! This sower sows seeds spontaneously and superabundantly! That is, *everyone* is invited to hear the word, the gospel of the realm of God in our midst. **Everyone!** Remember Jesus' invitation/warnin'? *"Listen!"* That's for **EVERYONE!** Not just some select group.

However, if you're a disciple, and someone who should be out sowin' some of this seed that Jesus is teaching ya how to sow, then you also have to know that not everyone is going to hear and respond in a positive way.

In the parable, Jesus says that some of the seed fell on the hard path. You know, it's a funny thing about seeds. They usually don't force their way into the ground. And that's true too about the seed of the gospel. It has to be taken in, accepted. Some folks have hearts that do that. They are open to the word of God. But some folks, for some reason, have hearts that are just too hard to take in God's word. They can't seem to understand it. And so it just sits there, they don't take it in and they miss that opportunity to grow in the Spirit. It get's snatched up, taken away.

Some seed fell on rocky ground. Hey, farmin' here in Maine, we know about rocky ground! It ain't real conducive to good farmin'. And Jesus compares this to those who might hear the gospel message and be all excited about it at first, but, you know the type, they really aren't grounded in it and don't ever make a strong commitment to it, and so they fall away when it becomes a bit difficult or it requires any kind of sacrifice. This also teaches us that being a disciple requires perseverance and real dedication and hard work.

Then there's the seed that falls amongst the thorns and the weeds. It's like those who hear the word of God, consider it, but they just can't seem to take the time to really invest in it. They are too invested in other things, the things of this world, wealth, and position, and their own desires and obsessions that seem to spring up all around them. So the word of God never comes to fruition in them.

But some seed does fall onto good soil! ***"Inch by inch, row by row, gonna make this garden grow, all it takes is a rake and a hoe and a piece of fertile ground."*** Yep, fertile ground, good soil, that's pretty important stuff! That's where the real growin' begins.

Yep, if it were up to me, I would just cast that seed on the good soil, because as every farmer well knows, even in good soil, with hard work weedin' and fertilizin' and doing everything right, it's still tough to get a good crop.

But God, and Jesus, they don't see it that way. They include everybody, give everybody a chance to *"Listen!"* and to *"Hear with ears to hear!"* And I think that we all get lots of opportunities to *"Listen!"* and to *hear* and to open our ears and our minds and our hearts.

Because God, Jesus, or the Spirit or however you want to name it, is still casting those seeds all around the place, still hopin' for a bumper crop. And you know, it happens. Cause each time one of us get's it, really get's it, it's like a grain of wheat or an ear of corn that produces thirty, sixty, a hundred fold or even more than itself!

Just think of anybody you've known who was really planted in the Spirit, really lived the word of God and how they exhibited love and joy and hope and compassion, not just for themselves, but for scores of folks they influenced, people they touched. Acres of fields they helped plant and bring to fruition! So I guess Jesus and God, they know what they're doing with this sowin' seeds stuff.

The only other thing I guess I need to tell you is what you already know. And that is that as disciples of Christ, you ought to be out there sowing seeds yourself, just like Jesus did. Which reminds me. I've got some gardenin' of my own to attend to. I'll see you out there in the fields!

***"Inch by inch, row by row, gonna make that garden grow,
all it takes is a rake and a hoe and a piece of fertile ground.
Inch by inch, row by row, someone bless these seeds I sow,
someone warm them from below 'till the rain comes tumblin' down."***