

“The Parable of the Sower”
The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Gail Sheddy - July 13, 2008

Genesis 25:19-34

Psalms 119:105-112

Romans 8:1-11

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

I am NOT a gardener.

Oh...I have some flower boxes and some pots that have some flowers in them but I do not consider myself a gardener like my friend Nancy who grows things from seed, purchases plants to plant in certain area of her garden. You know. Nor am I like Eunice who has the soil in her garden tilled and painstakingly plants her garden with the seeds that will grow into the cucumbers for the pickles, the tomatoes, the corn. Maybe I just don't have the knack. The patience. Or perhaps I have just never developed that touch.

Regardless, when I realized what the scripture would be for this Sunday that I chose to do the sermon, I decided my first line was going to be “I am NOT a gardener”.. But then I got to thinking that that might not work. We just heard a rendition of a SOWER sowing seeds...not a gardener planting them. (And NOT a seamstress sewing with thread). The vision of the sower sowing seeds didn't really fit with the opening line I wanted to use.

Darn.

I told Eunice and Carol about my opening line and how I had misgivings about using it when we drove to Tower a few Sunday's ago ... that I was working on my sermon and that I had decided it might not fit. Eunice said she thought I could still use it because the SOWER was really a kind of gardener...just not the traditional or common gardener with which we are so familiar. That made me feel better but it did tend to redirect my thoughts and focus somewhat differently.

A SOWER?

Can you envision how a SOWER worked in the olden days? Way back to the time of Jesus? Back to the early days of the development of the mid-West and West of the United States? A sower walked his fields, with a bag around his neck full of seed. He dipped his hand into the bag and flung it out across the ground. And that was that. Wherever the seeds fell, he hoped they would grow and produce. Obviously some did. Some did not.

Do you get the picture?

On top of the Nebraska State Capitol building in Lincoln, Nebraska where I was born stands a 19,000

pound, 19 foot bronze statue know as THE SOWER. He stands barefoot and without a hat, sowing seeds in the most primitive manner. He has a bag slung over his shoulder with seeds in the bag and as he walks across the field, he casts the grain . He is symbolic of the state of Nebraska as a major agricultural state and is not merely sowing seeds of grain.

He is, the history books tell us, the symbol of sowing seeds of life, hope and prosperity.

A SOWER.

Of course, as the days went by, times changed and the sower was replaced with equipment that did the sowing of the seeds. It was probably better for the farmer. I did wonder how if , as the sower was doing his work, he ever really prepared the soil to receive the seeds or paid attention as to where they were being sown. I can't imagine a farmer in Nebraska squandering his seeds today like the sower must have in the past. Being a product of a wheat farmer, I know how much the yield from each acre meant in terms of dollars and cents. And you sowed your seeds carefully on soil that would produce or you were quickly out of money to do anything the following year. You sowed so you could reap. You were a conscientious sower.

A SOWER.

In our gospel today, Jesus uses a parable or story to teach those who had gathered on the shore...listeners/followers/disciples... a lesson. He gets their attention by asking them to LISTEN and goes on to tell them about the SOWER who goes out into his fields to do his work and as he sows the seeds fall on different kinds of ground. He takes great pains to point out that the seeds that fell on the path were eaten by the birds. Those seeds that fell on rocky ground , didn't really have a chance to grow because while they sprang up quickly, there was no soil to nourish them so when the sun came out, they withered away. There were seeds that fell among the thorns and when the thorns grew up, the seeds were choked. But many seeds fell on good soil and brought forth a great harvest. We can all envision each of these situations. We can close our eyes and imagine how the seeds fared...or not...depending on where they ended up after the sower did his work. And Jesus calls the crowds attention to the lesson that lies beneath the words...

He who has ears to hear...let him hear.

What is interesting about this parable and what was NOT a part of our gospel reading is what happens next. Do you remember that the disciples came to Jesus and asked him "Why do you speak to them in parables?" In other words, what do you mean? What are you trying to say? And Jesus, instead of putting off the questions as he sometimes does, takes the time to explain the point of his "story". Basically, he says he speaks to them using the parable because they have not been given the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" like the disciples have...that there are those who profess to SEE but do NOT see and those who HEAR but do not understand. He goes on to give them an explanation of the parable...the story.

Hear then the parable of the sower.

The SOWER.

The seeds the sower sows can be likened to the WORD of God...the good news.

When those seeds...the Word...are heard by some, they are not understood ... the listener doesn't even try to understand them and they are "snatched away" ...no longer remaining in the heart of the listener. Those who receive the "Word" on stony ground try to understand, and receive the Word with joy but because they have shallow roots, their joy doesn't last. Any problems they encounter in their lives as they attempt to live in the joy the words have brought, causes them to stumble. Again, there are those the Word reaches but because they are more inclined to be give of themselves to the cares of the world and to be lured by wealth and riches are choked ... like the seeds in the thorny patch...and produce no fruit. But those who receive the Word on good ground...who hear it and understand it and who live it...will have a great harvest.

It is as simple as that.

There are two questions that came to my mind after hearing Jesus' explanation.

The first is "What can we learn from the story that can change our lives? What is Jesus asking of us?"

I think God is asking each of us to think about what kind of soil we have in our hearts to accept the good news? God's Word? We may profess to hear but really don't. There are those of us who struggle to keep the fields in good condition but are not always successful. There are those of us who easily follow God's teachings with little problem. There are those of us to try and fail and try again. But at least we are trying. And there are those who probably don't even try...Who are down and out and in need and can't even hear the good news or recognize it.

Mary, Mary Quite Contrary, How Does Your Garden Grow?

Ask yourself. Examine yourself. How will your harvest be? What can you do to make certain your soil is ripe to accept the seeds and produce?

The second question has a different focus: How can what we have learned from the story affect others? Those around us? How can we be sowers?

Not only do I think Jesus was telling his listeners to take a look at their own lives I also think he was telling them that each of them...each of us...can spread the good news by being aware of the different soils. He is telling us not to be discouraged if our words fall on deaf ears. At the same time, look to where our seeds are sown and, if we are successful, rejoice in the harvest. We are not to just think about ourselves... we are charged with thinking of others, gathering them into OUR fold so they can become fruitful. We are the sowers of the seeds...spreading God's teaching in our world ... hoping for a rich and plentiful harvest.

The SOWER.

Consider this: When Peter and I decided to pursue becoming involved in the Ely Ministerial Association, we were SOWING...spreading the good news about St. Mary's Total Ministry Team to the principals of all the other denominations in our town. That "sowing" has produced recognition and a better understanding of our church and our world throughout their congregations...Truly a bountiful harvest.

THE SOWER

I may not be a true gardener but I believe I am a sower. And I believe each of you are too. Carol with her prayers; Eunice with her outreach; Peter with his liturgy; Pam and Mary with their spiritual guidance; Will with his ability to reflect and share; Sue with her meditation; Pat with her abundant gifts of giving, and teaching; Me with my call as an evangelist. And the rest of you in your desire to see and hear.

Think about the sower atop the Nebraska Capitol building, casting his seeds far and wide ...a symbol of hope and prosperity.

God is watching over us, helping us along the way, giving us hope for our bountiful harvest.