

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany - February 23, 2025

Genesis 47:13–25; Psalm 107:1–3, 35–43; Acts 5:1–11; Luke 8:1–15

“Seeds and soil”

1. The technology of agriculture is something that continues to grow and improve.
 - a. My dad was a farmer and rancher as a young man, and I remember he pondered, when visiting us in rural Illinois, just how many laborers were replaced by a 12-row combine harvesting corn, for example
 - i. Dad had lived through an important period of industrialization of farming in the early part of the 20th century in Mexico
 - ii. As technology improvements continue to race past expectations, these days we wonder how many people will be out of jobs replaced by artificial intelligence.
 - b. So, back to agricultural technology, it has gotten fancier and fancier
 - i. With fast computers and GPS sensors built into their tractors and combines, a farmer has precise knowledge in real time about their location in the field,
 - ii. so they know where best to plant the seeds, how much fertilizer to drop, even what previous yields have been in that area
 - c. But even with that fancy technology, it still is absolutely necessary that there be preparation of the field before any planting can take place.
 - i. From the start, there would have been drainage tile planned and installed,
 - ii. There would be building up of ditches and perhaps irrigation systems
 - iii. There would have been physical obstacles removed
 - iv. Ultimately, a farmer has to prepare the field prior to them planting the seeds.
2. I’m puzzled, then, by the parable Jesus shares, because it seems that the farmer in this story is willing to spread seed haphazardly on all kinds of soil.
 - a. I wonder if the people listening to Jesus may have scratched their heads as to why exactly the farmer was throwing seeds like that.
 - i. In particular, they may have thought: That spot is no good.
 - ii. Someone could say: that’s full of rocks! Oh that spot is terrible!
 - iii. There are weeds there. It’s hard to pull them fast enough.
 - iv. No, we should only plant over here: This is the place where we have experienced good yield in the past.
 - b. But the farmer in this story doesn't seem too concerned about all that.
 - i. The farmer is just throwing the seed every which way.
 - ii. Now I wonder if as we hear this story, we think about whether the farmer was being wasteful or whether the farmer was not very good at what he did.
 - iii. Or was it that the farmer had more faith on that seed and on that ground than we do.
 - c. When Jesus explains the parable to the disciples, it becomes clear that he was talking about his own ministry.
 - i. He was that farmer who was throwing that seed every which way.

- ii. And he was sharing that word of God with every sort of person who would be willing to listen.
 - iii. Even if they would not listen for very long.
 - iv. Jesus was very confident in the power of that seed, of that Word of God.
 - 1. The farmer knew that seed would grow if given half a chance.
 - 2. The story speaks of different soil condition where the poor seed will try its best
 - a. Even if it doesn't even get a chance to get established in that hard packed soil because the birds were quicker to eat it than the seed was to throw down roots.
 - b. Or in that thin rocky soil
 - c. Or that invasive weedy patch
 - 3. But the point remains that the farmer had utmost confidence in the seed.
 - v. What's more, and I think what unlocks the meaning of the story, is that the farmer had utmost confidence that the fields could eventually respond.
 - 1. So in terms of what Jesus was doing, part of what I see here is that Jesus was not picking his spots as to where he would share the word.
 - 2. He was sharing the word everywhere with people for whom
 - a. this was not going to be a pleasant experience
 - b. and they would not do anything with what Jesus gave them
 - c. and he also shared it with people who had significant obstacles to overcome
 - d. and ultimately shared it with people who were eager to hear that word.
 - 3. But it is not clear that the people knew which "soil" they were
 - a. They didn't know whether they were the hardpacked soil
 - b. or the weedy soil or the rocky soil or the good soil.
 - c. So what is Jesus' example for us then?
 - d. Jesus is asking us to trust the seed (the Word of God) and to trust the soil (the heart of people).
- d. Now I imagine you might be thinking:
- i. "but some of that soil wasn't good soil" and I will agree only in part.
 - 1. It isn't that the soil was not good.
 - 2. It is that the circumstances around the soil were detrimental.
 - 3. You know how it is.
 - a. When we were young we might no have heard advice from our parents.
 - b. We were not ready to hear it and somehow it got filed away in a forgotten folder in the back of our mind
 - c. And then life happened and those words of advice surprisingly rushed out of that folder and reminded us that our parents had advised us or warned us about whatever that was.

- d. Suddenly we were finally ready to listen to that advice.
 - e. And we either picked up the phone and call them to thank them or mourned the fact we can no longer do that.
 - ii. When we are talking about the message of God's love and the good news of forgiveness and the challenge of creating community that is welcoming to all, just like Jesus was preaching, that is the Word Jesus was planting
 - 1. It is a message and a wisdom that is powerful and lasting and effective even if for some folk it doesn't feel like something they will like to spend much time listening to.
 - 2. First, part of our role then is to consider our own soil, how our own hearts will take in these words from Jesus
 - a. and to be honest with ourselves that there are times when there are some rocks and weeds and obstacles which we ourselves have to clear out of our own hearts.
 - b. We aren't always ready to hear what God has to say to us.
 - c. And so we have some work to do.
 - d. We have some preparation of soil to do.
 - 3. And secondly, it's also incumbent upon us to support removing the obstacles or address the distractions which keep others from fully listening to what Jesus is saying.
 - a. Now, it might feel like an intrusive thin
 - b. The soil is rocky and it likes being rocky (or it doesn't realize how rocky it is) and it isn't something that we or they are necessarily going to be able to prepare.
 - c. But rest assured that the good news of this story is that the seed is powerful, that the word is unstoppable and so even a little bit of preparation of the soil will go a long ways.
 - 4. You may have perhaps experienced times when you felt God working in you, helping you clear the soil of your heart so that a message of compassion or freedom finally reached your heart in a way that it hadn't before.
 - a. If we keep encouraging people to open their hearts to the Word of God's message of love, forgiveness and justice, we are doing faithful work. That Word will produce fruit.
- 3. Friends, we find ourselves in so many ways in the midst of crisis.
 - a. We could characterize it as political or theological but it involves our community, and part of our job is to be confident in the power of the seed, the Word of God's love that Jesus was talking about.
 - i. The word of God, the message of love, forgiveness, grace and community.
 - b. That is ultimately what brings us here.
 - i. We gather to nurture that seed in our hearts, and to help others tend it in their hearts

- ii. And we trust the seed, and we trust the soil in spite of its circumstances, but most of all, we trust the divine farmer who eagerly awaits that seed to produce fruit.

Sources: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-15/commentary-on-matthew-131-9-18-23-6>

Reflection questions

1. Share a piece of advice your parents gave you which, at the time they gave it to you, you were not ready to hear until much later.
2. What do you think about the farmer planting seeds in the parable on Luke 8:1–15?
3. With what “soil type” do you identify, and how do you work to “improve” your soil to allow the seed of God’s Word to be productive?