

Matthew 13 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
The Parable of the Sower

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears^[a] listen!"

The Purpose of the Parables

¹⁰Then the disciples came and asked him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" ¹¹He answered, "To you it has been given to know the secrets^[b] of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹²For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ¹³The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.'¹⁴With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

*'You will indeed listen, but never understand,
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.
¹⁵For this people's heart has grown dull,
and their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
so that they might not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and understand with their heart and turn—
and I would heal them.'*

¹⁶But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see

what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

The Parable of the Sower Explained

¹⁸“Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away.[Ⓢ]²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Life-giving Lessons: Where's Cisco Morris
When You Need Him?
Matthew 13: 1-23 NRSV
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If you've lived in the Northwest for any time at all, I think it is safe to say you are familiar with Cisco Morris. Cisco is a King County Master Gardener, former grounds keeper for Seattle University, in addition to doing regular gardening segments for King 5 television and radio.

As far as I can tell, he is popular for several reasons:
he is extremely knowledgeable
he truly believes that anyone can be a successful gardener
he is over-the-top-enthusiastic about gardening
and Oooh-la-la! He has fun! He makes me want to get outside and dig in the dirt!
He makes me think I actually can have a green thumb and grow anything!

But where was Cisco when Jesus needed him???
Jesus was a really good story teller, but he was not a very good gardener. Nope.
Because in this parable, that you and I are all too familiar with, the farmer does something that is unheard of. Wasteful. Totally NOT a good idea. Even *I* know--without Cisco's help--that you don't toss good seed onto poor or rocky soil and expect it to grow. Who would do that? No one who wants to grow a decent crop of anything.

But the farmer Jesus describes seems to be an equal-opportunity-sower. He scatters seed anywhere and everywhere. This farmer is indiscriminate! The seed is cast--tossed out or spread-- irrespective of the type of soil it lands on. Why would anyone do that? I'm quite sure that Cisco would not advise it. First, it wastes the seed, and secondly, it wastes the farmer's energy. Or does it???

Implicit in this parable is that this farmer is GOD. Hmm...one would think that if there was ever a *Master Gardener*, surely it was God, having created Eden, right???. One would think that God knows what God is doing! If that is the case, why would God be so wasteful, oops, I mean, extravagant with the seed?? Even so far as to sow it on good, marginal as well as on down right poor soil??

Let's consider the farmer...the seed...the soil...the harvest.

God is the farmer...God is the one sowing, with the purpose of reaping a harvest in due season.

How many of you have seen (in person) a giant California redwood tree? There are some sequoias alive today that were seedlings when Christ walked this earth! The oldest documented, by ring count, was 3500 years old!

Among the giants of the tree world, reaching over 400 feet in height, with trunks having a circumference of up to 100 feet around, but these giants grow from a very tiny, miniscule seed not much bigger than a grain of rice! Something powerful happens when a seed from a giant sequoia germinates and begins to grow!

So God, the farmer is sowing seed. What is the seed?

Jesus says the seed is the 'word'. What?? The Word of God?!

Let's consider "words" for a moment:

Words--all of us have experienced the power of words.

Words have the power to wound us deeply, cut us to the bone and lay us open.

Words have the power to edify us, and build us up so that we feel invincible!

Words have the power to console, to strengthen, to transform!

"In the beginning..." it was through the power of the spoken word, that God in three persons—the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—were all active and present at/in creation, and in calling the world into being.

The book of Hebrews begins with these words:

1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. (Hebrews 1:1-3)

John's gospel does not with the earthly birth of Jesus, but with this powerful acknowledgement regarding Jesus' identity:

John 1 New Living Translation (NLT)

1 In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

²He existed in the beginning with God.

³God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.

⁴The Word gave life to everything that was created
and his life brought light to everyone.

So if the seed that the Sower is sowing, is the Word, does that mean that we should be planting pages of scripture (the Word of God)? Hardly.

Note that like book ends, at both the beginning and the end of the parable as Jesus tells it, he says: "Listen!" "Let anyone with ears Listen!"

(If something is repeated in scripture it means, it's important!!) So Jesus is trying to get everyone's attention—both by repetition as well as by being explicit: Listen up people!!

Now my dear mom had a saying that I heard often:

"In one ear and out the other"—meaning that apparently no matter how many times she repeated something it never "stuck" between my ears! (I know it is hard to imagine that I was not the perfect child who hung on and obeyed her every word!!)

But I wonder if Jesus ever felt the way my mom felt?

Jesus has/and is the most life-giving message of all, and yet, folks heard it but they didn't often really listen. The evidence being, that their lives remained unchanged. The seed/word never really took root and produced transformative growth.

Here is the point of the parable:

"Listening to Jesus' words is the key to life; our ears are the soil of our lives. Ears attentively devoted to listening to the Word of Jesus are good soil; ears distracted, inattentive, casual, diffused in concentration are the several

unfruitful soils. The KEY attitude in life is the attitude of listening.” (p. 482, D. Bruner, vol 2)

To what or to whom do you listen?

Who has your ear? Who receives your attention?

We live in a very noisy world and there are many voices vying for our attention.

Some hear the word and listen, but there is little room for the word because other concerns crowd it out. Some hear and listen, but the word is choked out, absorbed by legitimate issues and concerns which take priority over it. There is a warning here: a life of discipleship has God’s Word at the center.

The soil’s task is to give the Word hospitality; to be receptive.

The fruit bearing—the harvest—is the outcome of the Word itself being heard, listened to, received. It is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Just as the miniscule seed of the sequoia has within it the power to produce a gigantic redwood tree, inherent in the Word itself, is the power to transform lives—my life and your life.

Jesus says that the outcome of the Word finding receptive, “good soil” will produce a great harvest. Each one bears fruit of varying amounts, but the excessive harvests that Jesus describes indicate that *one, there is no limit to what God can accomplish among those who yield their lives to him.* And two, “fruit” differs in kind and amount just as people are different. *In other words, we need not compare our lives with others.*

We need first and foremost, to Listen and receive the transformative Word of God into our lives, giving it time and priority in order to do its work in our lives.

The truth of the matter is this:

At different times we hear or listen differently...

At different times we respond to God’s Word differently.

In other words, the soil conditions of our lives change over time.

We may receive it with joy, but keeping Jesus' commands is not as fun as accepting the benefits of Jesus.

Tough times come and often we default to our pre-Christian settings and respond the way we did before we knew Jesus.

We respond to the Word with joy, but it takes time for it to take root and germinate. Those who "don't have time" for God/worship/bible study, have roots never go deep into the Word.

But hear this good news:

It is never too late to...to truly listen, to receptive God's Word and let it have its way in our lives. Oh la la! It's never too late!

ABC—

Admit you're a sinner

Believe the WORD, Jesus, that you are loved and forgiven

Confess your sin and your belief in Christ as Savior and Lord.

Then read the Word daily...

"Fruitfulness is not complicated. It is not a matter of a number of spiritual steps or of difficult disciplines or particular techniques. It is simply a matter of "receiving" or of "Understanding" the Word. All the rest is the work of the sovereign God.

"All the disciples needs to do is to under-stand the Word and let it be what it is—the Word of God."