

## Pentecost 6 – Proper 10 – Year A – 2020

Today our readings are steeped in the revelation of God in nature – in what we can learn about God and about ourselves from reflecting on what we see around us. Our reading from Isaiah and the words of Psalm 65 are full of images of the earth being watered, the soil softened, the seed sown.

The stage is then well set for our Gospel passage for today – commonly referred to as the parable of the sower. It is a *parable*, a story told to teach a lesson – but also generally one with a twist. I have to tell you, I think the crowd of folks gathered on the beach listening to Jesus as he sat in a boat off shore telling *this* parable would have been laughing – because the picture he describes – of a sower *strewing* his precious seed, willy-nilly – so that it is *not* going in those carefully prepared furrows softened by God’s rain and the sower’s work – would have been *ludicrous – hilarious!* Who would DO such a thing?! - These folks knew the passage from Isaiah. They knew about God sending the rain to prepare the soil and make it “bring forth and sprout” - not letting the moisture return without bearing fruit. – They also knew that seed was not something to be wasted... and yet here is Jesus, describing a sower who so *lavishly* spreads the seeds that some fall in places that is certainly *not* good soil...

So one of the lessons we have from these readings is about the generosity, the *lavishness* of God ... God spreads God’s love all around – even to places that seem unreceptive. Because we all know that something beautiful can grow, can spring up right in the crack in the sidewalk. In Greensburg, Indiana, near where I grew up, there is a tree growing out of the shingles on the roof of the courthouse! It became such a popular tourist attraction that they replaced it as needed on purpose, although the first one had sprouted and grown all on its own. – For me, the lesson is that I just need to be busy spreading the seed around. Sometimes it is not for me to worry about how it will be received. I don’t need to ask myself if my efforts will be wasted on someone who is rocky ground. I don’t need to feel badly if I’m rewarded with thorns. I just need to keep spreading the seed of that good news that says the reign of God, the way of God, is right here with us.

Of course, the parable is also about where the seed lands... on paths where it becomes bird feed – but birds have to eat, yes? In rocky places, where roots can’t grow – but one of the ways rocks get broken down to begin with is when seeds fall into crevices and *start* to grow, breaking the rocks apart *very slowly* over a *very long time*.... Some seed lands amid

thorns... but then those little seedlings are protected from the birds and other creatures by those very thorns – And some, of course, lands where the soil is good.

All you gardeners – how did you make your gardens good soil? You dug up the ground, a lot. You pulled out weeds. You pulled out roots that were running deep into the soil. You cleared it of rocks, of anything that might be an obstacle for the plants you hoped to grow there. You added fertilizer, perhaps – which in common parlance might mean that you took the manure that life gave you and worked it into the soil to become lifegiving. It was only then that you sowed seeds – or put plants in the ground – and gave them water.

My point is, good soil doesn't generally just come that way. It takes time and work to prepare, to *make* the soil good.

We've been talking here at Emmaus lately about how *everything* seems to be in turmoil. COVID-19, national politics; the rain forests are still burning. Australia is still burning. Children are still separated from their parents; people are still locked in cages at the border. And I hear people asking, "Why is all this racial stuff coming up now? Why are certain statues offensive *now* and not before?"

In the context of today's readings... in the context of reflecting on soil and gardens and sowing seed, this is what comes to me. Seeds have been being planted for a long time. *Jesus* was planting seeds... seeds of justice for all people. And he left his followers and us seed to sow as well. All the people we have named as saints, and no doubt even some we haven't, have planted seeds. Perhaps what we are seeing as upheaval and unrest and chaos is really the soil being tilled deeply enough to get at the roots of weeds long buried. And now we have been blessed to see what has been buried too long in that soil. We can see more clearly the rocks and thorns that have prevented the seeds of justice from taking root and bearing the fruit of peace. We have the opportunity to make room for the seeds planted long before to take root in *better* soil.

In his message this week, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry quoted Civil Rights theologian Howard Thurman, who said this:

"Look well to the growing edge! All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born; all around us life is dying and life is being born. The fruit ripens on the tree, the roots are silently at work in the darkness of the earth against a time when there shall be new leaves, fresh blossoms, green fruit. Such is the growing edge! It is the extra breath from the exhausted lung, the one more thing to try when all else

has failed, the upward reach of life when weariness closes in upon all endeavor. This is the basis of hope in moments of despair, the incentive to carry on when times are out of joint and men have lost their reason, the source of confidence when worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash. The birth of the child — life’s most dramatic answer to death — this is the growing edge incarnate. Look well to the growing edge!”

Yesterday I “attended” – on Facebook, of course - the ordination of three deacons in our diocese. There is a prayer in that liturgy that has always moved me and echoes what the bishop quoted from Thurman. The prayer says in part:

“let the whole world see and know  
that things which were being cast down are being raised up,  
and things which had grown old are being made new,  
and that all things are being brought to their perfection  
by him through whom all things were made...”

The middle verse of our hymn today says that our knowledge, sense and sight are shrouded in darkness – buried in the ground, so to speak – until the Spirit’s light hits us and that which God has long ago planted within us can come to life. Think of the circumstances of the world in which we live now, friends, as that light from God’s spirit – come to wake us, to stir us to live into hope.

Resurrection only follows death. Things long buried are being brought out of the dirt, and God is doing something new here – as God always does – giving us seed to sow with abandon, and helping us prepare the ground to be good soil, able to bear much fruit.

May it be so.

[Isaiah 55:10-13](#)

[Psalm 65: \(1-8\), 9-14](#)

[Romans 8:1-11](#)

[Matthew 13:1-9,18-23](#)