

Texts: Mark 4:1-34

Subject: Parables of The Sower

Theme: Figure it Out

2 Epiphany; Jan. 19, 2020, Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our father in heaven and the Lord Jesus,
Amen.

There's a prayer sometimes known as a Franciscan Blessing, or A Non-Traditional Prayer, it was actually written by Sister Ruth Marlene Fox, that goes:

*May God bless you with discomfort, At easy answers, half-truths,
And superficial relationships, So that you may live Deep within your heart.*

*May God bless you with anger At injustice, oppression,
And exploitation of people, So that you may work for Justice, freedom and peace.*

*May God bless you with tears, To shed for those who suffer pain,
Rejection, hunger and war, So that you may reach out your hand*

To comfort them and To turn their pain to joy.

It's a beautiful prayer, I think because it so accurately reflects the searching heart so often at the center of our lives of faith. We are discomforted by the reality of the world, we wonder and wander far from where we ought to be, we get angry, we shed tears, we suffer the indignities and pain that comes with life. A professor at seminary once said he had a lot of questions for God, and when he got to heaven he would ask the first and most important one, "What were you thinking?"

We want answers. We want them now. We want to figure it out.

I was listening to a radio show yesterday and they were talking about the way we understand time, and the origins of the universe. It's one of the oldest mysteries humans have tried to conquer. There are plenty of things that physicists can observe -

for example, that the universe is expanding, and even accelerating. Yet they admit there is so much about the origin of the universe they cannot yet understand. There are many things we have figured out over the years: cures for disease, fuel efficient engines, global positioning satellites technology, powerful computers that fit in our hands.

I guess knowledge doesn't solve all the problems of the world. We can spit on a Q-tip and drop it in the mail and someone will tell us the multitude of cultures and nationalities that make up our family of origin. Yet, *racism still exists* on our planet. When it comes to farming, we can now grow more food than ever before, but we still *struggle with hunger* in this country and across the world. We can call up someone across the world, see their face, get to know them, call them our friends, and yet *nations will continue to fight wars* and *terrorists will seek to hurt people they've never met*, and violence abounds.

Of course we want answers.

When we hear the parables of Jesus, we might see a simple answer and think we've decoded the message. After all, He says that's why he teaches in parables - so that some may not understand and be saved - but who are we in the story? Are we the ones closest to Him who understand? Do we know it all? The disciples struggle too - especially in Mark's gospel - to understand what Jesus is doing. The Pharisees are the ones here that seem to think they know it all - they've got easy answers for anyone who asks. The disciples have to be satisfied to watch and learn, to be alert, and keep their eyes on Jesus.

The crowds are getting large - so large, in fact that Jesus has to get on a boat so he can address them. He tells this story about a sower - doing what a sower does -

tossing out seeds. Not carefully planting with intentionality and patience, no - just flinging them all over the place. The seed goes everywhere - the path, the rocks, the thorns, but some seems to find the soil. Make's perfect sense, right? Now, when they're back at the house, Jesus tells them what it all means, but says that it's a secret for those outsiders. We wouldn't want them to figure it out and repent and be saved would we?

If that's indeed what's happening here - and that's a big if - how does that strike you? If the seed is the word of God, do we try to keep it all for ourselves? Do we bury it down deep in our memories, in our well-worn Bibles, tucked away in our dresser drawers like treasure too good for some. "They wouldn't get it," we might think. "They won't accept it, so I'm not going to share it." I can't just go around sharing the Word of God - some one might think I'm weird - or worse yet - they might think I'm WRONG!

Some scholars have said that this section where the parable is explained is Mark's interpretation. It's not bad - but why would the sower put the seeds in a place where they couldn't take root? What kind of wasteful farmer is this? I learned this week that a good return on planted seed is ten-fold growth - ten times the seed planted was a good day for someone working the land in Jesus' day.

In Iowa, I got to ride with Ben Schmidt in the combine one morning as they were harvesting the seed corn, likely to be shipped to Brazil. He showed me the GPS technology. The machine was a top of the line John Deere - it could practically run itself. *Just set it and forget it.* But he liked to ride up there - or maybe he stayed so I wouldn't push the wrong button and screw the whole thing up. I didn't know how to work it. But I could see that corn grew in perfect rows - why? It was planted precisely, using the same

GPS coordinates, plotted for accuracy, equidistant, in perfectly straight rows. They knew what they were doing.

But how does it grow? Where did the seed come from? How does it know to respond to the nutrients in the soil, the moisture and sunlight, to grow into food? Can the farmer really understand? it does what it's supposed to do, and when it is the right time, the food is harvested.

Jesus goes on to share about a lamp stand under a bushel basket - don't try this at home. We don't want you to burn down the house. No one does that. A lamp is to give light. That's what it is for. "there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light." Jesus knows what He is doing, knows where he is going. If this Bible is not entirely new to you, maybe you have figured out this much. Jesus is going to the cross to die for the sake of the world - the whole world - but until that time, he asks that some things remain a mystery. He asks disciples to keep quiet. He reminds them not everyone is ready to accept what must happen.

We know the story of the cross and the part after too - Jesus doesn't stay in the tomb. Spoiler alert - it's still the season of Epiphany but we are Easter people - Jesus is alive and the Word is among us! We have been fed, watered, and given the gift of growth through the Holy Spirit, called and sent, planted to grow and produce that good juicy fruit that feeds the world. We don't know it all. It's why we can hear these stories over and over again, and they have meaning for us in that we wrestle with the Word, we gather together to hear what it can say to us here and now. We wonder about the future, about what God is doing in our world, and when all else fails, trust that God's grace is enough, hold onto faith, and keep our eyes on Jesus.

That's when things get uncomfortable.

This week we remember the life and death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. One who put his life on the line for others, who spoke out even though it made him unpopular, who gave everything he had that our country would be freed from division, hatred, and violence, and that people of all races and ethnicities would be afforded equal rights. Those who marched with him, and the generations that followed still wait for fullness of the harvest of those days.

“Change doesn't happen overnight.”

“It's out of our hands.”

“There was nothing I could do.”

We hear the easy answers and are not satisfied. When the Word has been planted in our hearts, and our eyes are on Jesus, we cannot be comfortable with injustice, oppression, and exploitation. We rise up with Him. We are bold to confess God's love for all humanity, to shout down evil and the powers and principalities that thrive in the dark. We let the light shine. Followers of Jesus cry out for justice, for freedom, and equality - for liberty from the bondage of the past. We work together to seek a new future for our children and grandchildren. Anger becomes a motivator for change. Pain, rejection, hunger and war are no longer acceptable as the status quo.

We are hopeful. We hold on in faith. Still trying to figure it out.

This section on parables ends with the mustard seed - a small seed that grows up into a great shrub. A little seed is all it takes. The Kingdom of God is like that tiny seed. It starts small, but grows up bigger than any other. The seed that lands in good

soil grows fruit in abundance- thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold! That's an unheard of amount - it's more than we could even imagine!

I have to believe that God has not planted the Word with us that we would hide it away, but to share it with others, to boldly spread it around, even in ways that makes the world wonder.