

Horticulture for our Souls. By Tim Hall

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (A) – July 30, 2017

[RCL:] Genesis 29:15-28; Psalm 105:1-11, 45b; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Next Sunday we celebrate The Transfiguration, a marker on our path through the season after Pentecost. Today we wrap up a couple of narratives we've been following in the readings this month ...

In the Old Testament we've progressed from Abram's call to Jacob's marriages and the fulfillment of the beginnings of the great nation God promised Abraham. After the Transfiguration we will hear the story of Joseph and his brothers, great grandchildren of Abraham, the foundation of the 12 tribes of Israel...

Paul provides a stirring conclusion to the 8th chapter of his letter to the Romans. We are all born into this broken world, Paul has been telling the Romans. A world where creation itself, even while providing so many good things, is yet given over to suffering and decay. Paul preaches about the kind of world where those who live in the flesh are condemned to a life of sin and death, but those who live in the Spirit, the spirit of life in Christ Jesus as children of God, taking others yokes upon them, can happily endure our present sufferings having hope in the glory about to be revealed, when creation itself will be set free. And just how can we happily endure these sufferings? Through the love of God. For [reading from lectionary]...

And, finally, the concluding parable to a succession of agricultural images. First it was the Parable of the Sower. "Why have you begun speaking to the people in parables", the disciples ask. He tells them that they, the disciples, have been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven but the people don't easily understand and this is another way for Jesus to reach them, to paraphrase the prophecy from Isaiah that Jesus quotes... ***to open their ears to hearing and their eyes for seeing and their hearts to understanding.***

And then he draws the parallel between the parable of the sower and sowing of the word of the kingdom. Did you hear this parable last week? You remember... it's the one where the man sows seed and some lands on the path, some on rocks, some among thorns, and some on fertile ground. The seed on fertile ground grows and flourishes but the other seed, essentially, withers and dies.

There are two lessons to be learned here. First, oh that our hearts and our lives would be the "good soil", the *Spirit-filled soul soil*, so that we might hear and understand the word and bear fruit and yields far greater than what we receive.

And second, as sowers, oh that we would have the faith and courage to spread the word, the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven and salvation in Christ Jesus; and to cast this good news wildly – knowing that in some cases it may fall on rocky ground, or thin soil, or among thorns. But in so many other cases it will catch root and flourish abundantly.

Last week, it was the Parable of the Weeds in the Wheat. On the surface it feels similar to the Parable of the Sower. Both use agricultural metaphors. Both compare and contrast good,

healthy growth to corrupt, harmful growth. But while the Parable of the Sower speaks to us as individuals, as the providers of our own Spirit-filled soul soil in which the word can flourish, the Parable of Weeds in the Wheat speaks to **us** as **part** of the larger world and the judgement that will be meted out in the last days.

The Parable of the Sower is about the Kingdom now, in the disciples' present lives and ours, and how we should prepare our hearts and souls to hear and accept and live the Good News that Jesus preached.

And the Parable of the Weeds in the Wheat is about the "not yet" Kingdom. This is what Jesus is telling us when he says that the angels will collect out of the kingdom all causes of sin and evildoers. Creation will be set right again.

And today, the Parable of the Mustard Seed... A story about how remarkable growth can come from the smallest catalysts, a way of describing the Kingdom of Heaven. This Kingdom is so remarkable that it is worth giving up great gads of what we look on as important in our lives, in order to attain it. I think this is a good lesson for us here at Good Shepherd as we look to our future. We are a small church, a mustard seed among churches, but we know not what God might have in store for us...

I'd like to share some stories I found in our church archive...

{reading from notebook}

Talk about Chris Cunningham.

Talk about Diocesan grant and another rebirth.

Quote from this morning's Gospel...

~Amen