

DO SOMETHING GOOD WITH YOUR LIFE

Sermon preached by The Rev. Ralph W. Bayfield, D. Min., July 12, 2020

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“Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side..some seeds fell upon stony places...some seeds fell among thorns...some seed fell upon good ground.”¹ Matthew tells us Jesus spoke these words to a crowd so large on the shore, that he got into a boat to tell the people a parable about a sower and soil. Here Jesus is saying “*Do something good with your life.*” There’s an old German Proverb that says, “One does evil enough when One does nothing good.”² Do something good with your life.

I’m reminded of an old popular comic strip, “*Calvin and Hobbes*”, which revealed a deep insight into one aspect of our modern North American social process. The little boy Calvin is sitting under a tree with some sheets of paper in his hands when his big stuffed tiger, Hobbes walks up and says:

“What are you doing?”

And Calvin replies, “Getting rich!”

Hobbes says: “Really?”

And then Calvin launches into his speech:

“Yep. I’m writing a self-help book! There’s a huge market for this stuff. First, you convince people there’s something wrong with them. That’s easy because advertising has already conditioned people to feel insecure about their weight, looks, social status, sex appeal, and so on.

¹ Buttrick, George; Johnson, Sherman, Editors: *Interpreter’s Bible Volume 7; King James Version; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23*:Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, pages 408-409, 412-413

² German Parable, from memory, source forgotten by RWB

Next, you convince them that the problem is not their fault and that they're victims of larger forces. That's easy, because it's what people believe anyway. Nobody wants to be responsible for their own situation. "Finally, you convince them that with your expert advice and encouragement, they can conquer their problem and be happy!"

"Ingenious", Hobbes replies. "What problem will you help people solve?"

"Their addiction to self-help books!" Says Calvin.

"My book is called, *"Shut up and Stop Whining: How to do Something With Your Life Besides Thinking About Yourself."*

Hobbes: "You should probably wait for the advance payment before you buy anything."

Calvin: "The trouble is, if my program works. I won't be able to write a sequel."³

"Shut up and stop whining: how to do something good with your life besides thinking about yourself!" Jesus parable about the sower and the soil is fairly close to that kind of thought: "Do something good with your life." God expects a "harvest" from the life God has given us! - A fig tree produces figs; A seed of grain produces wheat, barley, rye etc. A fisherman produces fish; Tomato plants produce tomatoes, except the tomato plants I started as seedlings. They grew nicely, beautiful green leaves, green tomatoes, and the deer the other night had their supper of my tomato plants, leaving me with stems! I have to remember the deer are God's creatures, so for them it was a harvest. Those of us who believe in God, even if we are not very good farmers, are expected to produce good deeds!

³ Calvin and Hobbes; quoted in *Killington Sermons*; Toronto, ONT., July 11, 1993 page 1

Jesus went about doing good, and it is obvious from some of His parables, as well as His ministry and life, that Jesus expected that believers in God would also spend their lives doing good deeds, bringing a harvest of goodness out of the lives which God had given them! Not only the parable of the sower and soil, but parables like that of the Talents and the Sheep and the Goats underlined our Lord's teaching in this matter.

Doing good is a good guide for living in any case. Rarely is it penalized. The recent tragic, immoral takeover of Hong Kong, by the Communist regime of mainland China reminds me of an instance that was reported several years ago in the *New York Times*. It went like this:

“*Great Honest Investment*, a brokerage firm on the *Hong Kong Stock Exchange*, has been censured by authorities for charging clients too little commission.”⁴

We are to bring a harvest out of our lives which God has given us. It is to be a harvest of “doing good,” and that harvest can take all sorts of forms. Jesus invites us to reflect on God's reign by remembering how this miraculous growth first came about.

A sower goes out to sow, one step at a time, one handful of seeds at a time. The sower has no idea where each seed will fall, or even what will become of them. The sower's work is slow; the results of the task are uncertain.

The drama of God's reign is mirrored in the drama of the seeds, which may be carried off or choked, or may wither away even after they take root. While only a few seeds may thrive and bear fruit. Their yield may be amazing.

⁴ *ibid.* reported *Killington Sermons*, May 1993 page 2,

Just as the seedlings are formed in hidden places but spring forth in the open air, so it is with the life of faith. We grow and develop as we prepare for worship. We hear the story, sing the song, eat, drink and find Sabbath rest. We trust that seeds are being sown in us though we cannot predict which one's will bear fruit.

A minister once decided that a visual demonstration would add emphasis to the Sunday sermon about growing in good soil. He placed four worms in four separate containers.

The first worm was put into a bottle of *Virginia Gentleman* bourbon:

The second worm was put in a bottle that had captured cigarette smoke.

The third worm was put into a container of rich chocolate syrup.

The fourth worm was put into a container of good clean soil.

At the conclusion of the sermon, the minister reported the following results. The first worm in the bottle of bourbon: Dead. The second worm in cigarette smoke: Dead. The third worm in chocolate syrup: Dead. The fourth worm in good clean soil: Alive!

So the minister asked the congregation, "What can you learn from this demonstration?"

A little old woman in the back quickly raised her hand and answered. "As long as you drink, smoke and eat chocolate, you won't have worms!"⁵

She completely missed the point of the minister's sermon. The preacher was trying to illustrate the benefit of good soil. The listener heard only the results of the sower's efforts. This illustrates the fact that Jesus parable had two points, which were both important- the soil and the sower.

⁵ *Synthesis, Year A Proper 10. Scripture: PNMSI Boyds MD., July 13, 2014 page 2*

Henri Nouwen in his book *The Living Reminder* notes a saying that the French use to express the paradox of progress: “To step back in order to jump farther” (*Retirer pour mien saucer*). Nouwen states that all reformers are revisionists, people who remind their communities of the “original vision” of their cause. The task is returning the people to the source of their inspiration.

St. Benedict in the sixth century recaptured the vision of community; Luther in the sixteenth century, recaptured the vision of God’s gift of grace; John Wesley in the eighteenth century recaptured the vision of a living faith; Martin Luther King, Jr., in the twentieth century recaptured the vision of peace and justice for all; and today in the twenty-first century there is the vision that black as well as white lives matter. Statues of those who captained the slavery of the negroes are being torn down. Children no longer have to walk past the images that were fearful to them. We have work to do to restore the truth that the police officers are our best friends.

Nouwen asks: “How might confrontation and inspiration express themselves?” He answers: “Tell a story.” Jesus in His parables told stories that confronted and inspired people, not by bland doctrine, but through the medium of story.⁶

Let us hear stories, the parables of Jesus who breaks through our fearful barriers of resistance and challenges. Let us recognize God’s inbreaking presence in our lives. Jesus in the parable of the sower is tilling ground to make it bear fruit in our lives. May we pray and carry out our responsibilities to do something good in our lives. *AMEN*

⁶ Nouwen, Henri *The Living Reminder* ; quoted in *Synthesis Proper 10* , PNSMI Publisher, Boyds MD.; July 13, 2008 page 4

A PRAYER FOR THE HUMAN FAMILY

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Book of Common Prayer, page 815
by Charles F. Price, 1979*