

Year A, Pentecost +5, 7/13/14
Hope Central Church
Rev. Laura Ruth Jarrett
Mathew 13: 1-9 & 18-23
The Dirt on Composting the Soul

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

"Hear then the parable of the sower. When 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. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet 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. As 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. But 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."

Inch by inch, row by row,
I'm gonna make this garden grow
All it takes is a rake and a hoe
and a piece of fertile ground
Inch by inch, row by row,
God bless these seeds I sow
God warm them from below
'til the rain comes tumbling down

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts together be acceptable to you, O God, my rock and my redeemer.

All poetry and parable is local and time bound.

You know the poem by Robert Frost, about “Making Fences.”

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.

That's really a poem and parable of the countryside in New England, boulders, stone fences, about making good boundaries between people, especially when they have disagreements about apple trees and property lines.

If it were a poem and parable set in JP on my street, it might go like this:

Something there is that doesn't love an anchor fence,

And the poem and parable would be about: you keep your dog on your side, and if you curb and pick up after your dog, we'll get along just find.

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus is the poet:

The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed . . .
The kingdom of heaven is like yeast . . .
The kingdom of God is like a pearl of great worth . . .
The kingdom of God is like a net that was thrown . . .

And Jesus is the tell of parables, the story teller:

“Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as the seeds were scattered, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let everyone pay attention! “

Then, In our scripture, ensues a discussion between Jesus and his followers, which we are left out, if you notice the citation of scripture in our bulletin, verses 10-17 from our oral reading, about why, about the theory of why Jesus teaches in parables. The disciples asked Jesus, just as Northerners ask of every Southerner, “What's the Point?! What's the Point?!”

Not only is the telling of poetry and parable local, so is the understanding local. That is to say, where I'm from, folks try to figure out how to make sense of, how to put their minds around, how to strategize for the living of these days by telling stories.

Not just one well framed story is told out of nowhere, but someone starts and says y'all can't believe what happened to me. Then someone else tells a similar story, then there's another story, until folks begin to see a common vein, some common sense, a possibility of a way through.

My favorite thread of stories are coming out stories and stories about straight people. You know that straight women, they always say, "I shouldn't eat this," but then they do . . . or how butch women are stopped in the bathrooms, their gender mistaken, or how when someone has come out to their mother, their mother said, "I don't believe in homosexuality." These are survival stories – how to negotiate living in a world not set up to make sense for our living.

Another thread of stories I like are about White people. "You can't believe what someone said to me!" "I was asked for my id today in the grocery store." "I think I was tripped on the bus today. Was it because I'm black or was it an accident?"

Jesus told survival stories to his people, and Matthew collected them and wrote them down about 50 years after Jesus was executed, about 20 years after the war against the Jews, the temple destroyed. Imagine Boston overrun, thousands dead, the temples and churches bombed, and we've escaped to Brockton. We, too, would tell survival stories.

Jesus is telling them that no matter what is going on out there, no matter what is coming at you, the kingdom is within, and in community, one can find a fertile place for enlightenment and serenity to grow. Even displaced, we are not lost.

"When 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. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet 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. As 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. But 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."

That is our work is to find a fertile place or create a fertile place for the goodness of God to grow in us, for the kingdom of God to be manifest.

Maybe sometimes, we're living in the path of business, or taking care of other people's business, or wishing for what is not possible and we are impenetrable, the seed that is the news of the kingdom just bounces off of us.

Sometimes, the field of our heart is so rocky – we've spent so much time numb like rocks, building a shield of protection, or perhaps a shallow enthusiasm, that the seed that is the news of the kingdom springs up but withers from what ever travail visits.

Sometimes, our garden is so full of the thorns to which we have not attended, our addictions, our old grudges, there is no room for serenity or enlightenment.

Sometimes, the seed falls on us in some fertile time, or maybe we taken all the mess and scraps from our lives deliberately, and through the composting of all the little left overs and odor, we have made beautiful soil and we are ready to become the field of God's growth.

It's not that we're born rocky or thorny and we have no possibility of being a field, it's just seasons, somethings we need to do some weed pulling, and some heavy lifting of the rocks and perhaps landscaping with those rocks, and even fertile fields need their fallow season to remain fertility. But on what an amazing idea that God would make a garden of us. Troubles come, sorrows may never cease, but we have this garden in us. What a patch work of gardens we are in the kingdom of God that is our neighborhood.

And then, we become sowers ourselves, making gardens of mercy, rows of justice, and beds of consolation. Together, we can do this inch by inch, and row by row. Amen.