

LISTENING TO THE SOWER

Jesus used parables,.....not the *store*, but rather the *story* form for teaching lessons. Jesus used parables.

Matthew chapter 13 contains 7 parables, and they are all about the kingdom of heaven.

There is some ambiguity about the kingdom of heaven, and rightly so.

We could also label it: God's domain, God's way or the Gospel message. The haziness about this is appropriate; remember, Jesus often said, "The kingdom of heaven is like" ..yeast, or a mustard seed, or...something else. For a reason, Jesus didn't teach, "This is exactly what it is." Instead, Jesus prompted curiosity.

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The kingdom of heaven/God's way must be experienced. Each of us must encounter and discover the Gospel, and your perception and understanding may be different than mine. And, that matters little, because, more than anything else, The kingdom of God is a response/ it is a way of engaging life, each other and God.

I won't say more on that..... It is something each of us must explore.

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I do want to say a little about parables.

Parables were not just a "Jesus" thing. The colourful, story type mode of communication, known as a parable, was commonly used in Judaism and other cultures of that time.

The literal definition for parable is "cast alongside", as the story is "cast alongside" with the message being presented.

Sometimes they are esoteric--coded for those "inside" the particular group or focussed culture.

For example, a parable directed to our local farming society could be about a deer named John who went out into the field to drag a heavy load.

Someone from a large city likely would not get it, but we would.

There are situations when a parable is used to conceal a message from those outside the group, yet more often, they are simply an engaging mode of getting a message across.

A parable can be a simile, an allegory, a metaphor or even a pithy/ succinct saying.

I understand there are many such "parables" in low German.

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To be sure, they are **in** culture / relevant to the time and context; therefore, the Biblical parables need to be transposed and explained.

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Jesus' parables reflected everyday life, and were crafted in a plain manner for regular people.

In addition, we shouldn't read too much into a parable. A parable shouldn't be over-analyzed, searching to find symbolism in every detail.

Yet, the obvious meaning, may not be the lesson to be received.

Jesus' Parables often have a twist or a hook in them.

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Today's text from Matthew is in two parts. The first is the parable of the sower; the second is a typical allegorical explanation of the parable, which usually doesn't happen. Usually, parables are left to stand on their own.

Some scholars believe verses 18-23 were added later, because explaining a parable was more common in the second century.

This matters little because the overall message is Not altered.

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The parable of the Sower opens with "Listen"
The explanation, starting in verse 18, begins, "Hear then the parable of the sower."

Perhaps, it is important that we "take in" / "listen" carefully to this parable.

In case some of you don't know what's a sower. He/she is someone who casts / throws seeds, such as wheat or whatever. A sower is a human seeder.

As the sower was tossing seeds, some of the seeds fell on the packed ground of the pathway, and they were quickly plucked up by the birds.

The explanation equates this to those who totally ignore the words about the kingdom of heaven. The Gospel message does not take hold at all, and they are easy prey to all sorts of evil things.

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As the sower went along, some seeds fell on rock outcroppings. A few found cracks filled with a bit of soil, and when they sprouted next to the sun heated rock, they grew rapidly. Yet, they soon dried up and died.

This is explained as people who get excited about the Good News, thinking it will solve all their problems. Yet, they wither with disenchantment when difficulties come their way.

They are the proverbial "flash in the pan."

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Some seeds landed in a weedy area filled with thistles and cattails.
They tried to grow, but were overwhelmed by all the weeds around them.
We are told that situation is like people who hear about God's way, but refuse to or can't overcome the culture they live in. They want the promises of using popular culture / of being just like everyone else. Some may desire wealth and secular power. They want it all, including the benefits of kingdom living. But, only weeds prevail in a weedy patch.

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And then, some seeds fell on good, vibrant, living soil, and they grew and grew. Some grew by a 100 times, others 60 and lesser growth by 30. In those days, a yield of 25 times was considered a good harvest.

The explanation states that the seeds in good soil are the people who hear AND understand the words and way of Christ.

God's word was alive in Jesus, and comes alive like a seed planted in good soil to all those who accept, engage and live the way of Christ--God's way.

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The parable ends with the words, "Let anyone with ears listen!"
In other words,.....really, really ponder this and take it in.

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At first glance: a superficial perception casts a shadow on the unfortunate-- those in bad situations where the seeds are trapped.

We could build on that reflex view, and conclude that we Christians must make sure that we are the good soil.

And, that seems to be a common mandate in the culture of Christianity.

To be sure, church people know what good soil is. They define it,... and it tends to look like where most church people live and how they act.

This reflex is understandable, nobody wants to be overwhelmed, eaten by births or burned out.

Of course, church people want to survive and thrive, and they want the same for their children. So rules and expectations / standards are set that demand conformity,... all in the pursuit of living /being the good soil.

And, that makes sense,.....if the superficial reading with that premise is correct.

Yet, what about the poor souls who find themselves stuck in dire situations?

Well,.....those fortunate fertile ground people could do the noble thing and go rescue those struggling to live. The blessed could do mission work by making the outcasts become like them.....or.... they could work *their* bad ground until it is productive.

And, that makes sense,.....if the superficial reading / the premise is correct.

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Yet, if that perception is correct, then what should we conclude about the sower--the farmer?

That Sower Seeded on pathways???

Come to think about it, I have seen (Carl) seeding right across highway 11, wasting all those seeds.

I think I recall (Lloyd) seeding down into the ditches and through buzz lake.

And rocks,....oh we don't worry about rocks. Farmers just leave them in the fields, and even sow right over outcroppings.

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Anyone, everyone hearing this parable would be amazed, even shocked by the care freeness, extravagance, even carelessness of the seeder.

Seeds are sown are all over the place--on the pathway, into the bordering weeds and on top of rocks!

What kind of farmer would be so sloppy?

Who would be so "wasteful".....so extravagant with the seeds?

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Listen! Everyone /anyone with ears Listen!

Hear the parable of the sower.....and get a glimpse of the Kingdom of heaven....  
.....grasp the way of God.....understand / receive the Gospel message that Jesus presents and lives.

"Listen!

God-Whispers are flying through the air as if seeds carried in the beaks of birds ... ready to be dropped  
....wherever they might be dropped.

God-Love is bouncing all around  
as if millions of tiny steel pellets  
have been loosed from barrels  
of confinement ...  
rolling and bouncing haphazardly  
into the most unlikely of places.

God-Hope is being flung into the air  
like seeds from a careless sower  
without concern for waste ...  
with no plowed ground  
or fertilized field in sight.

Listen!

The Sower has plunged a hand  
into a sack of promise again ...  
throwing seed everywhere.

Can't you hear it?  
They bounce off of the rocks  
and sink deep into the wet sand.  
They are buried in the crevices  
of dry, cracked earth  
and some find home  
in warm, rich soil.

The Sower slings the seed without regard to soils or rocks or thorns or drought.

The words "**too lavish, how wasteful**" are whispered by naysayers  
and those who want perfectly-prepared soil before joining in  
with the seed-sowing.

The Sower sighs and bends down  
to admire the delicate violet

growing from a hole in the cement.  
The hand reaches into the sack of  
seed and brings out so much  
that the hopes and promises spill  
and puddle onto the ground.

"Listen", the Sower says.  
"Let anyone with ears, listen ...  
Be lavish and extravagant  
and even what seems a bit  
wasteful to some"  
(as more seed is hurled into the air).

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This Sower walks away,
his path marked by a trail of seeds,
by orchards of fruit-bearing trees
and by violets growing
from holes in cement.

Let anyone with ears, listen" © 2011 anna murdock

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Listen,.....take in the seed..... Let it grow.