

Gardening 101

Intro. It's haying season in many parts of the country including Florida. Friends of mine are busy cutting hay until late into the evening every day. They have two hay fields; one is high quality alfalfa for horses and the other a different quality for cattle. Even though once established the alfalfa comes back every year, it still needs basic care. After a while they know whether it will be a good or bad yield because of factors such as rain at the right time or an overabundance of gophers. The sower in the parable had a different purpose and a different strategy.

I. It seems a pretty straightforward story. The parable assumes all the seed is good. But it appears the sower isn't paying very close attention to where the seed is spread. The three unfavorable areas are

probably the edge of the field next to the road, the weeds that grow *along* the road and the rocks in the field. Is the sower simply daydreaming as she or he tossed the seed carelessly about? In his commentary, Fr. Daniel Harrington points out the seed is pretty much on its own to grow or die [*Sacra Pagina*, p. 194]. The sower's work is done and just waits to see what happens by chance. This where the parable becomes not really a story about a farmer and his seed.

The focus is really on the *ground* on which the seed fell and on its yield at harvest, *not* on the sower.

The original parable was about how many people of that time rejected the Lord's word. When Matthew wrote the gospel some years later, there was a similar struggle between Jewish people who rejected

the “Christian claims about Jesus” [Ibid, p. 197] and Jewish Christians who did not yet see themselves as separated from Israel. Like the disciples’ question to the Lord, why did some get it and others did not? It clearly is not the sower’s fault if we accept that the sower is God and the seed is his word. Therefore it must be the *ground*, the *hearers* of God’s word that have responsibility for the size of the harvest.

Concl. Even if we are not much of a gardener or farmer, we know seed needs a place where it has a fighting chance to grow. Weed-filled places and sidewalks are obvious places to avoid. To receive the word of God takes preparation on our parts, **if** we want a good yield of grace and strength and peace. Otherwise the Word doesn’t take root deep enough to withstand the challenges of life that threaten to wither it by our neglect, blow it away by evil, starve

it by our shallowness or choke it with worldly desires and distractions [Ibid, p. 201].

Could it be the sower is **generous** with the seed, giving every part of the field the opportunity to yield even a little? Maybe the point of the parable is that God gives every **person** the chance to hear and accept his word regardless of where we are in our spiritual journey. That is unbelievably generous! And risky. We can ignore the gift, as someone at our bible study said, “Feeding it only every seven days,” and then we are disappointed in the result. Or we can make sure it gets light and nourishment from prayer, the Eucharist and good works **every** day. Even what falls among the weeds and thorns grows something, but it’s a start.