

“Listen! A sower went out to sow . . .” (Matthew 13:2)

For reasons I still do not understand, the moment is still clearly etched in my memory. I had just celebrated my fifth birthday on a hot summer day and we were eating our dinner outside as the sun set beyond the backyard. The ice cool watermelon melted in my mouth as the juice ran down my bare legs. By the time I ate several pieces of it, my plate and the grass below me was covered in large black seeds. As I looked at the seeds it suddenly occurred to me that they would not grow on the grass. So, with hot sticky hands I gathered them up and took them to the flower garden by the back door. In a space in the garden I punched holes in the dirt with my finger and carefully placed the seeds in their new resting place. I covered them up and proceeded to get my watering can to assure their nourishment. Every morning for weeks I checked to see if they had sprouted. When we moved away at the end of summer, the garden was the last thing I checked. There was no sign of life and I was concerned about the future of my baby watermelons. I remember asking my mother the next summer if we could go back and check on their progress. The seeds we plant in life are important.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells a story about another kind of seed-planter. It is an odd story. “A sower went out to sow”, he says. Now most of you, I assume, at one time or another in your life have planted seeds, have you not? What did you do first? Of course! You prepared the ground. Even a five year old knows that. But this sower is different. He is the Johnny Appleseed of Palestine, scattering seed all over the place, regardless of the appropriateness of the site. Now what any farmer knows is that good seed is expensive. It is not to be squandered! If properly cared for and planted it will yield much! But Jesus tells the gathered crowd about another kind of sower of seeds, one that has total disregard for the condition of the soil, one whose supply of seed would seem to be endless. This sower is the Divine Farmer.

One of the seeds that God plants is placed in the womb of Rebekah. Last Sunday we heard the wonderful story of how it is that Rebekah came to be Isaac’s wife. In chapter 25 is the story their sons which are born out of their union together. And they are twins. Even in the womb they begin struggling with each other. Does anyone here have a twin? Twins are special. Identical or fraternal, they have a unique connection with each other that none of us has with our other siblings. They have a kind of connection that might be similar to the one that we have with our own differing selves. The way they are described is interesting. Esau, the firstborn, is an outdoor, presumably athletic, robust, meat eating kind of guy. Jacob is a home-body, quiet in temperament, perhaps more intuitive in nature. In today’s world he might be an artist or writer. They represent two differing styles of being human – certainly not identical twins! Their parents complicate the family dynamics by each loving one more than the other! Dysfunctional families did not begin in the 20<sup>th</sup> century!

So this seed, planted by God, grows into a divided family. And, as we heard, Jacob takes advantage of his brother’s need for food (being the physically active one) and trades him stew for his birthright. For Esau reasons that his birthright will do him no good if he is dead (starving as he is).

Each of us here today is on a particular path that has a history and an ongoing story. We, too, have been planted in particular places and family circumstances. And perhaps we are, at times, in conflict with members of our families, or even within ourselves. What is this planted seed trying to become? And how can we grow into the fullness of life that God has planted us to be? How can the soil of our souls be fertile instead of rocky and hard?

As followers of Jesus we offer the seed of our life to the world around us. Like Jesus, we become the Word that is offered regardless of the preparation of the soil around us. Sometimes our life falls on the weeds of rejection and apathy. But at other times, especially when we gather together as Christ’s community, the soil around us is fertile and life giving, so that our seeds grow deep roots and the fruit of God’s abundant love spreads more than we could have possibly imagined. It’s an interesting paradox that as we offer the seed of our life, the soil of our

heart is enriched, softened and fertilized with love, too. The Divine life is embedded in us, grows out of us, and nourishes the life that is eternal.

The truth is that we do not know what will come of the offering of the seed of our lives. Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador who was martyred on March 24, 1980 put it this way: *“This is what we are about: We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities. . . . We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master [gardener] and the worker. We are workers, not master [gardeners], ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.”*<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes, in the midst of confusion and conflict we can't see the gardening work that God is doing in our lives. There is more to the story of Esau and Jacob, of course, and the circumstance gets worse. Isaac grows old and is close to death. Rebekah plots for Jacob to get Isaac's blessing so he will be the clear heir to their wealth and she will have great influence with him. (Isaac does not know that Esau sold his birthright as firstborn to Esau.) Jacob gets the blessing and then he and Esau part on very bad terms with each other. Much later, after Jacob has traveled much and wrestled with an angel to be reclaimed by Divine grace, he will encounter his brother as an adult, with much fear and trepidation. The story ends well as Esau embraces him and blesses him. The two become one again. We all have an Esau in our life. Our Esau might be a member of our family, or the shadow side of our own self. Coming to grips with our Esau is an important part of spiritual growth. In God's garden the seeds that are planted are brought to their fullness if we allow it. New growth, a new plant, is possible. Both parts of the family or parts of our selves are needed for the wholeness that is intended by God.

I still wonder about those watermelon seeds. Perhaps they grew up as weeds that someone else pulled out and discarded. But maybe, just maybe, they grew to be a vine with the luscious fruit of summer that surprised the new owner of the house with a sense of joy and love. It is what I would wish for whoever lives in that house today and I know what God wants to lavish on all of us every day.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> I do not know source for this quote which I have had for some time. The original uses builder in place of gardener but I think it still carries the same meaning.