

## 12 July 2020: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (Proper 10)

My mother said I was a “busy child”; she had a gift for euphemism. To keep me occupied while travelling she taught me how to read a map and encouraged me to follow our progress. Of course, a map is only valuable if you know where you are, and where you are going.

Jesus gives us many maps. They are not like our maps, because while each of Jesus’ maps is different, they all lead to the same place: to Him. The Gospels contain these maps, all the stories about Jesus: His parables, teachings, miracles. Altogether they make a tapestry of maps that mystically become one great map.

Today’s Parable of The Sower is a kind of map so we may know two things: the kind of journey we are on, and, from where we are starting. How will we know what is important if we do not know the kind of journey? In the mountains hiking boots are needed, but useless for sailing. We need to know our starting point, or we will roam around trying to find our bearings.

What is the journey? Well, a sower threw seed around; much of the seed never grew, or only briefly. This was not a map anyone looked for. They expected God’s Kingdom to come in a blaze of glory, bringing freedom, justice, and peace. They expected the journey to be swift, the destination close. Jesus’ map indicates the Kingdom comes secretly, mysteriously, paradoxically. God invites many to the journey, but not everyone accepts the invitation, and many who do fall away. However, this was and is God’s way of working, with good reason. God is patient, giving people time to see the kind of journey to which God calls them, who they truly are on the road, and time to travel the long, winding path towards holiness.

From where do we start? Some seed fell on the path, an image for those with minds hardened against God, minds packed with their own wisdom. The seeds cannot penetrate, and the Word is snatched away. Some begin the journey here, hardened by self-sufficiency. The journey continues with asking God to break apart whatever hardness of mind we have; until the seed of the Kingdom is buried deep in the furrows of our souls.

Some seed fell on rocky ground. An early, anonymous Bible scholar wrote about the rocky soil: *it is the sin nature that remains in the soul of the faithful who are still drawn towards the flesh.* One’s attachment to sin—especially “favorite” sins—produce a shallow and rootless life that prevents the deep conversion of the whole person necessary for one’s journey into the Kingdom. Therefore, the journey involves desire for “purity of heart” in our thoughts, words, and actions, always with God’s help.

Some seed fell among weeds. Here, the person is receptive to receiving God’s Kingdom, but also receptive to what kills the Kingdom life. Jesus specifically notes wealth, which means we Americans need to pay attention. Again from the anonymous Bible scholar: *If the Word of God is jeopardized because you desire wealth or fear to lose what you have or wish to acquire what you do not have, you do not profess your faith.* It is impossible to take two diverging roads at the same time. If our pursuit of creation’s pleasures are more important than life in the Creator, we are on the wrong path.

Some seed fell on good soil. There is no description, implying good soil is the polar opposite of the first three: good soil is not hardened by sin but deeply receives and nurtures the Word; a life built on desire for God, growing as God desires; without divided loyalties, saying “yes” to God first, last and always. This is the one who grows, matures, and bears extravagant fruit for the Kingdom of God.

This is a gentle teaching. Jesus does not say ‘the careless received the Word and lost it; the rich received and choked it; the superficial betrayed it.’ He is not severe. Jesus tells a simple story and leaves it to each one to decide how their journey proceeds and ends.

If you are like me, you see all four soils in you. I must begin there: with the mess that is me. I must take the right actions so God will plow under, weed out and purify me. For me it is seldom easy and sometimes painful. Yet God is merciful, His patience eternal. God invites us to journey with Christ into Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit. We have the maps; we know what to leave and what to bring. We have only to begin, and always begin again. Amen.