

**Sunday July 12, 2020      6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost      Year A**

### The Goodness of God

Professor William Barclay Comments in his New Daily Study Bible; The Gospel of Matthew, ‘As Jesus was using the boat by the lakeside as a pulpit, in one of the fields near the shore a sower was actually sowing, and Jesus took the sower, whom they could all see, and began: ‘Look at the sower there sowing his seeds in that field!’ Jesus began from something which at the moment they could all actually see to open their minds to the truth which as yet they had never seen.’ The people of Jesus gathered around him to learn about the Kingdom. Being the crowd was so great, Jesus had to sit in a boat offshore to teach. But Jesus taught in such a way to cause frustration and insight. Instead of teaching clearly, he allowed the listener to put the pieces together. In this way, the listener and the reader could grow spiritually.

What are your favorite parables? Why are they your favorite? My favorite is the woman at the well. I can see myself in her. Having a rough life, not being able to settle with just one man, but having several different relationships and the thing that really gets me is even being a Samaritan, Jesus not only talked to her but also forgave her of her sin. When I first studied that passage many years ago, I felt then that what I had done in my life, not criminal, but yet not thinking that I could ever be forgiven, until this passage.

In Larry Broding commentary 'The Goodness of God' he writes; 'He told them many (things) in parables, saying, "Look! The sower went out to sow (the seeds). As he sowed, some (seeds) fell along the (narrow) path (in the field), and, having come, the birds ate them up. Other (seeds) fell on the rocky ground where there was not much soil, and soon they spouted, since they did not have the depth of soil (to grow). But, since the sun had risen (high in the sky), (the sprouts) were burned and, since, they had no roots (to grow), they were dried out. Other (seeds) fell among the thorns (seedlings), and the thorns grew up and choked (the seeds).

In Palestine, there were two ways of sowing seed. It could be sown by the sower scattering it as he walked up and down the field. But if the wind was blowing, some of the seed would be caught by the wind and blown into all kinds of places, and sometimes out of the field altogether. The second way was a lazy way but was not uncommonly used. It was to cut a hole in the corner of the sack, and then walk the animal up and down the field while the seed ran out. Some of the seed might will dribble out while the animal was crossing the pathway and before it reached the field at all.

Broding also comments 'The parable of the sower and the seed shocked Jesus' audience for wasteful planting and the abundant harvest. Ancient people saw waste as an abuse of the rich. When they discussed economics, most ancient people agreed on two points. First, there was

only a limited amount of wealth in the world. Second, God (or the gods) willed the distribution of that wealth within a rigid social class system. The rich (five percent of the population) held ninety percent of the wealth and the poor battled for survival. The ancients would consider our modern notions of creating wealth and individual betterment absurd.'

Imagine their attitude toward waste. They would recycle any useful object and pick up any useful seed so they could replant it in good soil. Yet the farmer in the parable threw seed around without thought. Did he flaunt his wealth? Or did he totally lack common sense?

How do you view wealth? The rich? How do you use your money wisely? Do you have any hobbies or charities others might see as wasteful? What satisfaction do you derive from spending money on them? Most of my money goes for essentials, you know, rent, gas, (for both home and car), electricity, and food. I really try not to waste my money, but sometimes it just happens. I see something I really don't need but want. I do spend a little more than I should for my hobby, but it does keep me busy and happy. Like the quilt I am making for my sister Sharon. The fabric was cheap, but it has given me a lot of pleasure making this for her.

Jesus considered this parable important enough to give it two emphatic statements: "Look!" at the beginning and "Those who have ears, listen!" at the end. Why? To emphasize the blessings of God's

Kingdom. God's blessings seemed as irrational to Jesus' audience as they do today. God blessed the wicked with riches while the good suffer. Yet, the suffering of the good led to much greater blessings. Such was God's Kingdom.

Like any good story, Broding says 'the parables of Jesus had many levels of meaning. Jesus interpreted this parable for the missionary ministry of the apostles. He viewed the sower as the missionary preaching to the crowds. Some in the crowd reject the message outright (like seeds on the hardened path). Others receive the message but are immature and quickly lose interest in the face of opposition (like the seeds on rocky soil which the sun burnt). A third group become Christians but never enjoy spiritual growth, since worries of the world get in the way (like the seeds sown with thorn weeds). The last group grows abundantly in Christ, since they willingly place themselves at risk (like seeds in a deep, rich soil that is turned over and over).' Jesus meant his parables to shock and baffle his audience for a reason. He told parables to make his audience think. Applied to our modern life, the parable of the sower and the seed still poses a challenge. This parable is aimed at two sets of people. It is aimed at the hearers of the Word and if we take the parable as a warning to hearers, it means that there are different ways of accepting the word of God, and the fruit which it produces depends on the hearts of those who accept it. The fate of any spoken word depends on the hearers.

There are hearers with shut minds. These are people into whose minds the word has no more chance of gaining entry than the seed has of settling into the ground that has been beaten hard by many feet. There are things that can shut a person's mind. Prejudice can make them blind to everything they do not wish to see. It can be the result of pride that does not know what it needs to know. It can be the result of fear of new truth and the refusal to adventure on the ways of thought. Sometimes an immoral character and a particular way of life can shut the mind. There may be truth which condemns the things that someone loves and which accuses the things that he or she does; and many refuse to listen to or to recognize the truth which condemns them, for there are none so blind as those who deliberately will not see.

There are hearers with minds like the shallow ground. They are people who fail to think things out and think them through. Some are at the mercy of every new craze. They take a new thing up quickly and just as quickly drop it. Some people's lives are littered with things they began and never finished. It is possible to be like that with the Word. When people hear it, they may be swept off their feet with an emotional reaction; but no one can live on an emotion. We all have minds; it is our moral obligation to have an intelligent faith. Christianity has its demands, and these demands must be faced before it can be accepted. The Christian offer is not only a privilege, it is also a responsibility.

As Broding comments in *The Goodness of God* 'There are hearers that have so many interests in life that often the most important things get crowded out. They have their careers to worry about, maybe family, hobbies that take up a lot of space and time. Sometimes we just can't fit going to church or even just praying at home. We are too preoccupied with many things that we forget to study the word of God. We can become so involved in committees and good works and charitable services that we leave ourselves no time for him from whom all love and service come. Our work can take such a hold that we are too tired to think of anything else. It is not even that we deliberately banish prayer and the Bible and the Church from our lives; it can be that we often think of them and intend to make time for them, but somehow in our crowded lives never get around to it. We must be careful to see that Christ is not pushed into the sidelines of life.

And then there are people like the good ground. Like the good ground, their minds are open. They are at all times ready to learn. They are prepared to hear. They are never either too proud or too busy to listen. Many of us would have been saved all kinds of heartbreak if we had simply stopped to listen to the voice of a wise friend or to the voice of God. Such people understand. They have thought things out and know what this means for them and are prepared to accept it. They translate their hearing into action. The real hearers are those who listen, who understand and who obey.'

Can waste and abundance described be blessings in God's kingdom?

How can we risk our hearts, like the soil in the parable, to receive God's Word, like the seeds?

Thanks be to God.

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Commentaries

1. Professor William Barclay: New Daily Study Bible; The Gospel of Matthew
2. Larry Broding: The Goodness of God