

The parable of the sower



Colour me!



Luke 8:4-15

When a large crowd from several towns had gathered around Jesus, he told them this story: A farmer went out to scatter seed in a field. While the farmer was doing it, some of the seeds fell along the road and were stepped on or eaten by birds. Other seeds fell on rocky ground and started growing. But the plants did not have enough water and soon dried up. Some other seeds fell where thorn bushes grew up and choked the plants. The rest of the seeds fell on good ground where they grew and produced a hundred times as many seeds. When Jesus had finished speaking, he said, "If you have ears, pay attention!"

Jesus' disciples asked him what the story meant. So he answered: I have explained the secrets about God's kingdom to you, but for others I can only use stories. These people look, but they don't see, and they hear, but they don't understand.

This is what the story means: The seed is God's message, and the seeds that fell along the road are the people who hear the message. But the devil comes and snatches the message out of their hearts, so that they will not believe and be saved. The seeds that fell on rocky ground are the people who gladly hear the message and accept it. But they don't have deep roots, and they believe only for a little while. As soon as life gets hard, they give up. The seeds that fell among the thorn bushes are also people who hear the message. But they are so eager for riches and pleasures that they never produce anything. Those seeds that fell on good ground are the people who listen to the message and keep it in good and honest hearts. They last and produce a harvest.

Commentary

Jesus' preferred storytelling style seems to have been the parable—a story based on everyday life that carried deeper meanings. As he explained to his disciples, he used parables to share secrets about God's kingdom, but it took real commitment from his hearers to understand them, and most people didn't bother to try.

The mysterious world of seeds and how and where they grow was a popular choice for his parables. On one level, this story simply describes what most of his listeners saw happening in the fields around them every day, which is what makes it so accessible and memorable, but what happened to the seeds in a range of soils opens up thoughts about how God's message is received or not received by all sorts of people. It seems, however, that most people, including his disciples, didn't understand the deeper meaning (at least, the first time they heard it) and certainly parables need to be heard more than once. It's all down to whether we really have 'ears to hear'; but for those who do, there is always more to discover.

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Questions

- ▶ What's your favourite story? Why is it special to you?
- ▶ Jesus used ordinary life as the subject matter for his stories. Can you find parables about God in the things you experience each day?
- ▶ Why couldn't the disciples understand the story?
- ▶ Do you think that the meaning Jesus gives is the only way to understand this story? He himself says that the seed is both God's message and also someone who listens.



Visual aid

Take a look at different sorts of seeds, both of vegetables and of other kinds of plants. Try to relate the seeds in front of you to the pictures on the packets.



Activity idea

You will need to plan this activity to last over several weeks. Choose a variety of different sorts of seeds (for example, mint, sunflowers, peas, beans) and plant them in shallow trays in damp cotton wool or maybe under a thin layer of soil in a window box. Note how slowly the seeds grow. Do the different sorts of seeds grow differently? And if so, why?



Prayer idea

Hold seeds in the palm of your hand and link your prayers to different aspects of the life of a seed. For example, each seed has all its future life wrapped up inside it, just like you and me; each seed needs water and sunshine, just as we need to be fed with Bible stories, prayer, Christian friendship and love; each seed has the power to go on and produce more seeds, just as we can go on to do good and share God's love with others throughout our lives.

Key verse

When Jesus had finished speaking, he said, "If you have ears, pay attention!" (Luke 8:8)

Old Testament story link

Judges 9:7-15: Gideon's only surviving son, Jotham, tells a parable to the leaders at Shechem.



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