

Matthew 13:1-23 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop-- a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear." ¹⁰ The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" ¹¹ He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. ¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. ¹⁵ For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'" {15 Isaiah 6:9,10} ¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷ For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it. ¹⁸ "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. ²² The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

"The Power of a Seed"

I think one of the greatest mysteries of all time is how a seed grows. I'm sure biologists have this one all figured out. You take a seed put it in a moist environment. The outer shell begins to decompose which lets off gases which coupled with the moisture produce some sort of enzymatic reaction in the seed and it shoots out something called a radical which becomes a root. Then a sprout develops and the seed as you knew it before is consumed into a plant which grows and in turn produces more seeds.

The dandelion is one of the most fantastic examples of this mystery. If it weren't for the lawn care industry the dandelion would probably be the most dominant plant on earth. The sheer power of its growth is amazing. I remember not long after our parking lot was paved there were a couple of places where dandelion plants pushed up through the asphalt.

If someone could find out how to tap into dandelion growth as a power source, I think the world's need for power could be met quite easily. Here's some science for you. The first law of thermodynamics is that “energy may be transformed from one form to another, but it cannot be created or destroyed.” If you apply that law to dandelion seeds, it becomes mind boggling that in those tiny little seeds that parachute around throughout the spring and the summer lays dormant enough power to grow a plant through asphalt. That's phenomenal.

I think Jesus himself was quite impressed with the mystery of seeds and how they grow. He probably sat beside many a field saying, “Dad, we done well.” If you consider the latent power in a small seed, it's ability to transform and grow a plant, and its ability to in the end produce an astounding number of more seeds, it is no wonder that Jesus compared the word of the kingdom of heaven to a small unassumingly insignificant seed.

Just a couple of preliminary remarks about the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom is Jesus himself and his power to reign in this creation manifested in the new reality that all things are being and will be totally in the end made new. It is the power of God's love for his creation being made manifest through Jesus God the Son become human. Moreover, God the Son uniting with physical matter. (Don't short change what God is doing through Jesus Christ by thinking it only concerns human beings. It involves the whole of physical matter.) In this parable Jesus wants us to know that the kingdom of Heaven or rather the incarnation of God the Son as Jesus Christ is like a seed and its energy, its power to grow. Seeds have this latent power in them to change, grow, and reproduce. Jesus was/is a new seed planted into the creation that has within itself the power of God's very self and his love for his creation; a new seed has been planted in the entirety of the physical universe with the power of God to make all things new; a new seed that through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit has been and will continue to grow the kingdom of heaven, a kingdom where humanity begins to bear the image of Jesus Christ. The seed of new creation, Jesus Christ God the Son become human is by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit becoming the plant of the kingdom of heaven which is bearing the fruit of more seeds, people like you and I in whom the Spirit is living and working to make us more like Christ Jesus until in the end we are all raised from the dead and all things will be made new and be filled with the knowledge of God. I know that's a deep little bit of theology for you, but grab a copy of the sermon on the way out and take it home and ponder these things. Jesus is the seed of the kingdom who died and was raised and who is being transformed into new humanity filled with the Spirit of God and by the Holy Spirit's work among people just like you and I we too right now are being transformed to be like Christ.

In, through, and as Jesus Christ God has reconciled all things to himself and by the continuing presence and work of the Holy Spirit God is regenerating all things to become like Christ Jesus until in the end the great harvest of the New Creation happens and all things are made new. That's the seed, the word of the kingdom of heaven. This is a new word spoken by God, a word which will come to fruition just as creation came into being. Just as God spoke through Isaiah saying, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

This word of the kingdom of heaven is going on at all times in all places in all things. And as it is a word that is spoken so it is that we somehow hear it. It's heard like a summons, a call to stand before God, a call to find the answer to the question of who are you God.

Many people are wrestling with that question these days. There are many church experts who say that there has been a great spiritual awakening going on globally since the mid 1960's. Yet, oddly in Europe and North America people have been awakening with a hunger for things spiritual but have not turned to the Christian faith to find the answer to who it is that is calling to them. There are many people outside the church who say they know there is a God who is personally present in their lives and that their lives would be incomplete without the sense of purpose that God brings to them. They pray and have experiences of the mystical nature. In these people, the seed of the word of the kingdom has been sown, sown by God himself. The Holy Spirit is indeed at work in this world in people who are outside anything having to do with church and is calling them to faith.

The question that then follows is where does it grow from there, from this simple uninformed and often misinformed experience of God. If the seed that has been sown in them is indeed the work of the Holy Spirit sooner or later these people will look to Jesus to find answers. Therefore, we in the church need to be darn sure we are giving them the right Jesus. I think that the number one way that the evil one snatches away this seed that God has sown in so many is by using the church and Christian hypocrisy. We have to make clear to all people that Jesus has wonderfully called them to discipleship, to come to him and learn and be changed and healed along the way. We need to be clear that the one who calls them is fully found in the community of believers. Jesus cannot be known apart from his body, the fellowship of his disciples who are wrestling with the Scriptures and holding one another accountable to growing and becoming more Christ-like, a true community where mutual self-giving love is the rule, a community that worships together, prays together, and ministers to one another, and together serve in charity. The Holy Spirit calls people to meet Christ in Christian community. He calls us beyond our own private experiences into the place where two are three are gathered in Jesus name and he is in their midst.

Unfortunately, this call to the kingdom can turn people away because it is costly in personal terms. Jesus places demands on our lives. As the Apostle Paul said we cannot continue to live according to the flesh and be his disciples. As Romans 8 says we must live according to the Spirit. Christian hypocrisy, indeed the seed snatcher, becomes most evident when we in the church say we follow Jesus but we don't yield to his Spirit who is at work in us. We don't let ourselves be changed and the result is that our Christian fellowship winds up being nothing more than a Jesus club that celebrates with joy when things are going well but as soon as we find ourselves in a situation where we must stand on faith we forget we ever knew Jesus.

Our lifestyles are our greatest barrier to the growth of the seed in us. In all honesty, we don't bear seed bearing fruit because we refuse to let our lifestyles come under the scrutiny and transforming power of the Holy Spirit. I confess that for myself. Our lifestyles are shaped more by the values of our culture than by the Scriptures. I confess that for myself. Growth in Christ occurs, fruit bearing occurs when we yield up every corner of our lives to the refining fire of his great love and will to heal us and make us more Christ-like. You know, sometimes we get stuck in our walk, in our growth in Christ and we'll stay that way for years. And oftentimes were stuck because we've plateaued at a point of where there are somethings in our lives that we just aren't going to yield up to the Spirit. This is the point where we have to sincerely ask ourselves what are my weeds, not my needs but my weeds, and find a couple of prayer partners to help us let the grace of God in.

Good soil for the Christian is simply not letting ourselves stand in the way of the Spirit's work in us as individual believers and as a community of disciples. Good soil is prayer

partnership. If you look at the church's that are sincerely growing in Christ, not just in number but in Christlike-ness they will all have in common this thing of two or three or more friends in Christ getting together sharing their joys, sharing their hurts, confessing their sins and praying together. That kind of fellowship is good soil and from it comes forth much growth and seed bearing. So, I ask you folks a question. We are a small church. The fellowship here is quite deep, yet I wonder how good the soil really is. So, the question is what would it take to get us together in smaller groups that we might pray and minister together. Moreover, what is the weed that prevents it? Amen.