

Being gardens. July 12th. Based on: Matthew 13.1-23

The teacher sat on the flat edge of a large stone, folded his hands and waited. His closest friends and disciples gathered around him, quizzing and questioning him about his stories and the complex nature they often portrayed.

The gathered were from all walks of life and although they were dedicated to the journey they had been invited into, they were often confused and unable to move past their own fears and ignorance. Their collective lack of worldly wisdom often undermined the ability to discern the teaching of the master. But they stayed close and loyal as the teacher exuded an acceptance and intelligent wisdom they thirsted for.

As evening fell onto the gathered group of sojourners and after the teacher retired to a place of quiet for reflection, prayer and sleep, they sat around the small fire and talked of the day's events and engaged in conversation to help them discern the stories the teacher shared.

Tonight their minds hearkened back to the layered story of the gardeners and their struggle to sow seeds in the soil of their land. They looked, one to the other-some shrugged, some just shook their heads, others stared into the fire and then one spoke up.

"How about we imagine we are the gardeners from the story. Each of us perceives the soil as our own relationship or journey with God and how we are living that out in the world."

Another interjected. "If we are to envision the story as our own, the environment we live in and our personal history as well as current fears, joys and friendships, needs to be accounted for."

The group listened to each other-they had grown in becoming better listeners as they often needed to reflect for hours, days even weeks, in order to begin to comprehend the teacher.

Sometimes it was hard for them to stay the course, it was taxing, difficult work in a world of poverty, subjugation, scarcity and religious/political domination. But they felt brave together and the teacher's kindness was extended to all.

The teacher's wisdom and their own experience had created space for them to look beyond the boxes that their lives were held in.

"Perhaps it is not about each of us being one kind of gardener, but more about us experiencing the different stages the gardens present and how we can relate it to our own journeys."

The words of the teacher settled upon them.

'Hear then the parable of the sower.

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path.'

Consider: In our ignorance and when we are narrow in mind, comprehending words that are unfamiliar or that challenge us to think differently, creates soil for the ego to grow which overtakes the still voice of God and leaves a path barren and wanting.

Most of the gathered recognized their own nature of judgment and a thinness in their thinking which superseded the wisdom in the teacher's words. It was difficult to think differently and be open to new perspectives, so many of them had bruised hearts and they learned to be protective and cling to the familiar.

Still they recognized the depth which the story invited them into and a few chose to be more conscious of their trappings and vowed to be more open to the possibilities of spiritual emancipation that could heal and rejuvenate them.

And the parable continued.

'As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away.'

There was struggle among the gathered to fathom what this could mean. It felt contrary.

Then one spoke up.

"Maybe it is like a container of fresh water, gathered from the cool running river which offers sustenance to cook, drink and bathe in. And in that moment we celebrate collecting the water. But if we do not use it, it will evaporate in the hot sun and we will be left unfilled and thirsty."

And the parable continued.

'As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing.'

The gathered each saw themselves in this as the lure of wealth and the ways of the world seem to offer them a life that could be better than the one they had. They could live separate from want and hunger. This part of the story they all understood and it was why they were sitting around a fire, talking, while the teacher rested.

They were done with the ways of greed, privileged liberties and the oppression from religious and political authoritarians that devastated communities.

They admitted to not being entirely free of the wanting-but their hearts knew; this was not the way to God.

And lastly the parable finished.

'But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.'

pause

They watched the fire burn down to embers. The night sky vast and full of countless stars and galaxies. Finding a spot to lay, not far from the last fire warmth and one another, they collected their blanket rolls and one by one curled up and fell into sleep. And in the drifting they felt their hearts affirm that the teacher was the garden that bore the fruit of God. And with so much passion and depth of love, he wanted each of them to know that they were the good soil that could bear and yield this exciting truth of God's beloved community that was here now, sleeping around a dying campfire, ready to embark on the greatest journey of their lives.

The teacher, not far but in shadow bowed his head, wrapped himself in his blanket and fell into slumber. His children were safe and at this moment, all was well in the world.