

A Sustaining Faith ~ July 10, 2011
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23; Psalm 119:105-112

If anyone ever were to ask you where they could find a collection of the parables of Jesus, an easy answer would be, “In the thirteenth chapter of Matthew.” While parables are found in all the gospels, in this particular chapter, one parable follows another, some coming with explanations.

Often these parables were difficult for those early followers to grasp. A parable is “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” Those who heard Jesus were required to do a little work to understand the message he brought to them. Not all things were or are meant to be clear to everyone. Each parable can mean different things to different people, depending on where they are in life and how observant they have been.

Often, as we grow in our faith we discover nuances to the scriptures that we might have never noticed before. We need to have a willingness to pause every now and then and consider the wisdom that lies within the pages of our Bible.

In the parable for this morning, one most of us have heard many, many times, Jesus was telling those who had ears and who would and could listen, the value of a sustaining, deep-rooted faith. Those of us who have been through the grist mills of life know that nothing has upheld us better than a sustaining faith in God. While there might have been times when our faith has faltered, it has never been destroyed, because, somewhere, somehow, we were anchored in the knowledge that God is the one who always hears us when the world seems to turn away.

In this parable, Jesus noted that there were some who possessed a “flash in the pan” kind of faith. They were represented by the seed that fell on rocky, shallow soil. They were captured by his words and his charisma only to fade fast when he was no longer among them.

Others were represented by the seed that fell among the thorns. In spite of all good intentions, the battles and temptations of life were too much for them and they were overtaken by the world.

A few fortunate seeds fell, and continue to fall on good, rich soil. These seeds take root and flourish and we journey on.

Years ago, and far away, I was in a group of people who were searching for a greater sense of spiritual fulfillment. I was the only one in this group who was still in the “institutional church.” I was told by those who had chosen to leave, that the church was no longer relevant to their lives and or that the church had hurt them in one way or another.

Yes, I know people have been injured by the church and its doctrines and some of its members, never by God. I would not try to defend the church as they knew it. I had been bumped around a bit by my own church but never thought of abandoning it—it was and is a part of my life.

The people I met with at that time had been exposed to the seeds of wisdom that reside in the Christian faith, seeds that might have sprung up and flourished for a bit and then faded away. Or, they might have had the seeds fall on them and never had them begin to grow. But, they all

had grown up in a church structure and had been exposed to the basics of our faith by parents who believed that a being grounded in faith was important.

Because of their disenchantment, they told me they had kept their children away from the Christian church. They did not want them injured. They asked me if I thought they were “right in doing this or wrong.” Never ask me that kind of question.

I responded that I could not judge whether they were right or wrong, I only believed that it was important for people to have a strong base from which to operate in life. They needed something, whether Christian or not, that they could carry with them through life, or choose to follow or to reject. But, I told them I believed that we all need something to hang onto when times get tough. What was it their children would have? They had no answer. They had not even allowed them what they had had, a faith they could reject when they became inquiring people.

I believe the seeds we sow still are relevant. It takes those who have depth of soil to understand this and to want to nurture and grow the tiny seeds we have been so freely offered. We can decide what we will do with them. The choice is always ours. We all have an idea of how the seeds tossed in our direction have grown. We know, deep down within, if those little seeds have flourished in our lives or not.

Truly, this morning, I am preaching to the choir. We would not be here if we did not have the depth of soil needed to have a strongly rooted faith—one that considers the seeds of wisdom and understands how they are relevant to our lives and how, through nourishing them, we help others see the great value of living up to Christian values. Through receiving those seeds of love, forgiveness, patience, hope and joy and nourishing them, we produce even more seeds to share with the world. If we have ears, let us hear. We need to take the seeds that fall upon us into our hearts and grow the circle of our sustaining faith. Amen