

EXTRAVAGANT SOWING

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

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Did you know the first-century followers of Jesus experienced discouragement about the slow spread of the gospel? We usually focus on their successes. But by the time Matthew put together his gospel, the infant church was experiencing confusion and discouragement. Not everyone who was hearing good news was responding. So Matthew reports this story told by Jesus about a sower and seed and soil. Not every seed bears fruit.

We grow discouraged sometimes, too. We worry as COVID-19 takes its toll. What is the future of the church? Even before the pandemic, people were so indifferent and unresponsive to the gospel. Some of you have prayed for loved ones for years and years without results.

Jesus wants to encourage us. There is nothing wrong with the seed of God's Word. It is powerful. A tiny seed can do so much. I've done some reading this summer on the London Blitz, the Nazi bombing of England in WWII. One night a raid set the London Natural History Museum on fire. The firemen's hoses doused the building, causing a seed collection to germinate. They were mimosa tree seedlings that were 147 years old [*The Splendid and the Vile*, by Erik Larson, pp. 248-249]. Yes. Seeds have life within them!

Notice the seed sown is the same seed in each of the cases Jesus mentions. The variable is not the seed, but the soil. Hard soil (v. 4), rocky soil (v. 5) and weed-infested soil (v. 7) and finally rich, fertile soil (v. 8). So the problem of rejecting the gospel is not usually an intellectual problem but a spiritual one, a state of the heart. How do you know if your heart is ready to receive the word and trust Christ? When you are open and can admit your need. When you can see how much God loves you and what Christ has done for you. When God's Spirit tugs at you.

But there's more. Farmers and gardeners know: a germination period always follows planting. Everything is silent. It looks like nothing is happening. It seems like a long time.

When some of us traveled to Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain, we heard Belarussian Baptists tell about such a germination period. Before communism fell, they had prayed years for revival. When it finally came, I heard one of the church leaders say that they planned to evangelize and plant churches without regard to consequences because they knew the power of God's Word.

One Monday many years ago, I was really discouraged. I had had a tangle with a store clerk. I was dealing with tensions in the church. I was feeling pressure all around. And out of the blue, Tim called me. "Not sure if you'll remember me." He was from a church I had pastored 25 years before. Of course I remembered him. He had been trouble-making little brat in our youth group! He just called to tell me thanks for loving him when I was his pastor, for taking time with him. And to say he was glad he was a Christian.

Sometimes, it just takes time. What's more, you never know for sure what seed will take root and what will not. Or when. So we have to sow the gospel intentionally and extravagantly. And leave the results to God. Our job is to share and sow. It's God's job to do the miracle stuff, lifechanging stuff.