

Mark 4: 1-9, 14-20

Again Jesus began to teach beside the lake. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the lake and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the lake on the land. ²He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³'Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.' ⁹And he said, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!'

¹⁴The sower sows the word. ¹⁵These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. ¹⁶And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, ¹⁹but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²⁰And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.'

Commentary: Here we have a classic parable and its interpretation. I am one of those who believe that parables can have several layers of meaning. The early church reflected in Mark's gospel account, heard the meaning given in vs.14-20. There are those who hear the word of the gospel in whom it never takes root. There are those who hear it and rejoice in its message, but cannot endure the trials and tribulations of life without losing their faith. There are those who hear the word and take it in, but then fall away in the face of the anxieties and material preoccupations of life. Finally, there are those who hear the word in whom it takes deep root. It grows in spite of trials and tribulations, anxieties and preoccupations, producing fruits of compassion, generosity, service and inner peace.

But we can also see in the different responses to the word a part of us. We too may have areas in our lives where the application of the word has never taken root. We too can be weakened and confused in the face of life's trials and tribulations whenever and however they come. We too can lose our focus and become distracted because of anxieties or material preoccupations and desires. All of these things can happen to us in spite of the fact that the word has taken root and produced some fruit in us.

Do you see yourself in any of the responses to the word described in this parable? Are there things in your life that hinder a greater yield of divine fruit in you? We ponder such questions especially in this season of Covid-19. We need all of God's presence and energy in our hearts and minds as we can get. How do we purge and create space in

us? How do we use this time to build and grow a pathway? How do we measure the fruit's yield?

Prayer: Lord God, I know you have planted your seed in me and there has been fruitful growth. But I also know there are times when the soil in me is parched, weed infested and lacking depth? What has happened to the seed? Maybe there are areas in my life where your word has never taken root. There are times when I have been confused and full of doubt about you and my life in you, periods when I am distracted and preoccupied with material things, petty things, things that shouldn't matter as they do. I thank you that you embrace me in your forgiveness. I thank you that you have not given up on me and that you will keep seeking to produce your fruit in me. Give me the grace and courage to have faith in what you can do in me... Amen.