

4 Pentecost / Proper 10

July 10, 2011

Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's in the Fields

Genesis 25:19-34

Jacob took Esau's birth right

Romans 8:1-11

Those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The parable of the sower: Rather, of the four soils.

Teach: Bwana ase fiwe. Amen.

The Gospel story today is usually called the Parable of the Sower; it is really a story about the Four Soils that the seeds were cast upon.

Who is the sower? (Jesus)

What is the seed? (Christian truth, the Word of the Kingdom-v19)

What is the soil? (What the Word finds where it falls: our openness)

In three out of four cases, the seed does not produce a plant that bears fruit. The skill of the sower and the quality of the seed are not the problem. The hazard to the seed bearing fruit is the quality of the soil. For the teachings of Jesus to bear fruit in our lives and to affect other lives, we need to understand what Jesus is saying about the quality of the soils. I suggest that we examine the truth that each of us **has all four kinds of soil** at work in us.

On the Path: Some days I feel that I am too busy for God; too busy for church; I see churches filled with conflict; I see more judgment than love by church goers.

For the times that we realize that our spiritual life has become like the well worn foot path, we can decide to step off the path, and make intentional time for being with God. We can give ourselves a chance to let the God in us come out. In Tanzania my group visited 13 parishes in one day. Every one of those churches met us with 20-50 people, singing and dancing, many waving branches, wanting to shake our hands. Some had been waiting for us for more than four hours. But all I saw was joy, excitement, and gratitude for our visit. I saw that God was planted in them. **What works for you when life feels too busy for God?**

On Rocky Ground: This is the case of shallow planting; we can fall in love with vestments, candle stands, incense, and formal prayers; but we can lack endurance of faith to sustain us when something difficult to handle hits us.

When we recognize times that our spiritual roots are shallow, and the shoots are feeling fragile, we can clean out the rocks, and add Miracle Grow to our soil. We can join a Bible study; buy a good study Bible; listen to inspirational audio messages. In Tanzania, almost every church I visited had a portable generator, huge speakers, a big amp, and music that filled the air throughout the village. When we arrived, even if 20 people met us, within 10 minutes there were 75 people in the church. Music is a huge part of their Miracle Grow. **What works for you when you are working on your spiritual roots?**

Among Thorns: This represents when we try to balance being God-centered with being career-centered, self-centered, money-centered, house-centered, gadget-centered. We

have 20 balls in the air all the time, and church is just another one of the balls in the air. We have good intentions for our spirituality, but those intentions only work out when time allows.

In these times, when our spiritual life is being choked by all the distractions of life, we can shed load; we can delegate activities off our action list; we can re-prioritize. This means dropping off a committee, resigning from a group, saying 'no thanks' to an invitation, suggesting a different way to meet: by email or 3-way calling or FaceBook!

What do you do to ensure that your faith life is the priority in your life?

Good Soil: This is when we recognize God's presence, we celebrate it, and we incorporate it into our thought process for everything we do.

Paul explains that those of us who decide to live according to the Spirit, are under the rule of God; and that decision brings renewal of life. God's Spirit comes to dwell in us, and we can then live no longer 'in the flesh', but we live 'in the Spirit'. In the words of Jesus' parable of the soils, you and I can prepare our own spiritual soil, so that God can thrive in our life. The lesson for us is to check the status of our spiritual soil; Do God's word and will have a chance of growing here? If not, we can add soil amendment: we can add spiritual Miracle Grow to our lives.

There are MANY hazards the seed has to endure. (the blackberry vines)

The seedlings in our gardens form in hidden places, before springing up in the open air. This is just like our life of faith. We sprout here, within our protected community, singing, praying, and worshipping God together. What happens in here holds the promise to produce amazing growth in the world.

This 'faith' we profess is not just a religious 'thing' we can chose to join; it is a new way to see ourselves, a new way to live life, a new way to understand that you and I can be changed from the inside out. The seed that Jesus spreads through our actions in this world is not just 'interesting information'. It is news that changes lives. And if it does not change lives, something is very wrong. Something is out of whack. Something needs to change.

One more way we can change the spiritual soil God finds in us is by also being a seed thrower. Practice random acts of kindness. It sounds corny, but it turns heads in an un-loving world. And it spreads (shaking hands while touching the right elbow-people to me, and me to elderly women). Random acts of kindness spread.

Care nothing for the outcome of the seed-sowing. Fling seeds everywhere. That would not make sense to a farmer, but God's seed is no ordinary seed. Where it lands is God's concern, not ours. Fling seeds of faith everywhere.

May God's seed, living and growing in you, be used by God to change the world.
Bwana ase fiwe. Amen.