

Surrounded by God

Sermon notes for the sermon
Given by Rev. Dr. Gregory B. Young
On Sunday, July 9, 2011

Sermon:

Cindy, my wife, used to tell the story from her childhood about a family drive to farm country. As they would pass by a dairy farm with their windows wide open, Cindy and her sister would complain about the smell of the cows. Their dad would just smile and take a deep breath and say, "That's just the smell of good, clean country air!" One thing that you should know about Cindy's dad is that while he was earning his bachelor's degree in engineering at Lehigh University, he worked on a farm. He had come to appreciate the smells of a farm as compared to the choking, stale air of the city, where he was raised. For farmers and those who have lived and worked in the country, the sights and sounds and smells of the farm are reminders of the goodness of the earth and all life that God has created.

Jesus and his disciples were travelling on foot throughout the country side. Many of Jesus' stories and parables center on images from farming country. Today's Gospel reading is no exception.

Imagine if you will Jesus travelling a country road with his disciples and others following along. They come upon a farm that is alive with a growing crop. Jesus finds a place to sit down and invites those on the journey with him to sit, observe, and listen. After all have caught

their breath and settled in Jesus tells this parable of the farmer who went out to sow seed. Many if not all who were with Jesus understood how farmers planted. They understood about scattering the seed; about the growth of the plants; and about the harvest. One thing, however, was puzzling – why would the farmer plant seed in places where it would not have a chance to grow to maturity? Why would the farmer plant on soil that was rocky, or throw seeds in soil that had a thorn bush; why would the farmer toss seeds where the birds to feast and no crop would grow?

In reading the parable it becomes clear that the farmer was not concerned about the parts of the field that would potentially not yield plants. He could see the path that had been trampled down for years. Even though it was dirt path, there had been so many to walk on it that it had become like concrete. Some of the seed that the farmer sowed fell upon that path and the birds quickly made use of it as food. The seed was not wasted; it just found another purpose and another way to sustain life.

The seed that fell upon rocky ground came as a surprise to the farmer. The rocks were under the soil and created a condition unknown to the farmer where the soil did not have much depth. As the root systems of the plants started to develop and they reached the rocks, the roots had nowhere to go. With shallow, undeveloped roots the plants didn't stand a chance in the heat of the day and soon the plants were lost. This was a waste of seed that just couldn't be helped. The farmer was not aware that the rocks were hidden just

below the surface of the soil so the loss was something that could not be avoided.

Someone might argue that the farmer should have known from the previous growing seasons about the rocks. Allow me to share two observations: 1) over time, rocks shift under the soil. Sometimes they are pushed up so that we can see them and other times they go deeper into the ground; 2) Jesus is not talking about a small family garden with this parable. He is talking about a large farm with lots of land. Every year the farmer is presented with a new set of circumstances and so the rocks surprise the farmer. The seed that fell upon the shallow soil and failed to grow because of the rocks actually was not wasted because it provided nutrients for the soil. Perhaps next year the soil in this area will be deep enough to sustain grow and the soil will have the nutrients needed for growth.

With reference to the thorn bushes notice that Jesus that the “thorns grew up and choked the seed of the farmer.” The thorn bushes were not fully developed at the time of the sowing of the seed. In fact, they may have just been a small little green sprig emerging from the soil. The farmer did not take the time to investigate what was growing. Rather, he sowed the seed with the hope that it would not be choked out. The farmer sowed all of the seed with the hope that a good crop would come and, indeed, Jesus ends the parable with this expected outcome.

God’s kingdom is all around us. We are surrounded by God. God seeks to bring the growth of his kingdom to all. Even to those who dwell in

the dark and what seem to be the god-forsaken places in this world. The hope is that the kingdom will take root and grow. The good news is that there are many planting and growing seasons and in time we can begin to see the kingdom in places where we never expected to see any positive growth.