

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 “Jesus told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow.”

“All that you touch, you change.
All that you change, changes you.
The only lasting truth is change.” Octavia Butler, Parable of the Sower

Parable of the Sower, Octavia E. Butler’s sci-fi Afrofuturist novel, has now been adapted for the stage, and was going to debut this spring through Arts Emerson at the Cutler Majestic Theatre. It features music and lyrics composed by Toshi Reagon, in collaboration with her mother Bernice Johnson Reagon, whom you might know from the social justice singing group Sweet Honey in the Rock.

It is the story of Lauren Olamina, who lives in a not-so-distant America where climate change has driven society to violence and the brink of extinction. When she loses both family and homes, she ventures out into the unknown. What begins as a desperate fight for survival leads to something more profound: a startling vision of human destiny that births the seeds of a new faith.

So here we are at the 13th chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, also known as the Justice Gospel. Jesus has become well known throughout the nearby cities and villages. Many who followed him have seen and experienced his acts of mercy, how he cured lepers, raised the sick from their beds and brought the dead back to life. As he travelled from place to place, Jesus taught people and his disciples many things, like God’s goodness, how to go about their daily life and work, care for their neighbor, love their enemies, and how to pray. His messages were clear and spoken in a way that most would understand. The crowds grew so much so that in today’s gospel, Jesus finds himself teaching from a boat while the people gathered along the shore. He had already picked up John the Baptizer’s announcement about the nearness of the reign of God so we are moved into transformation, from the invisible to the visible of God’s presence on earth. And as his time to go to Jerusalem draws closer, there is an urgency to bring this new faith to life much like that shown by Lauren.

Today’s parable is the first of many stories that Jesus told so that his disciples might better get a picture of the reign of God that exists on earth. Over and over again, he would use images that most of his listeners would be able to relate to: “The reign of God is like a mustard seed, like treasure in a field, like yeast, like a great pearl, like a net let down in the sea.”

The Parable of the Sower is a familiar one to us. It is simply a sower who goes out to throw seeds and scatters seed everywhere. During this pandemic time, many of us have bought seeds or seedlings that were either delivered by mail, picked-up curbside, or bought in line at our local nursery. We planted them in neat rows of containers and marked what we planted where. We took the time to methodically prepare the soil and map out where each seed or seedling was to go.

But the sower scattered seeds everywhere! Some of it falls on hard ground, clearly exposed and is immediately snatched away by birds. Some of it falls on ground full of gravel and little soil. The seed grows up but quickly dies from lack of nourishment. The tender plants wither away. Some of the seeds fall among the thorns and the thorns eventually choked the plants and they died. And the last of the seed fell on good rich soil and luscious plants grew.

We hear this story and it is easy enough to wonder which soil we might be. We know the beaten path of life and what it is to be packed down. At some point our lives we have been rocky patches. We have been bruised and scratched by the thorns of life. And we have known the experience of having our feet firmly planted in good spaces where all is right with the world.

If we hear this parable and equate it with the seed being the Word of God again we might wonder what kind of soil we are.

- Are we that hard, rocky and thorny soil where nothing will grow or are we the well-weeded and fertilized soil?
- Are we among the hard soil people who hear the Word of God, but do not take it to heart?
- Are we the rocky soil people where the seed of God blossoms for a while but then we get bored and move on?
- Are we among those who hear the Word of God but then we get tangled up and distracted by worldly things?

Jesus did not introduce this parable by saying: “This is the kind of soil the sower had to work with. This is the kind of dirt you should be.” He said: “Listen! A sower went out to sow.”

With any parable that Jesus taught there are always more layers than first appear. We hear this parable and think it is a story all about us. This story is less about us and more about the reign of God and in particular—it is a story about who God is. It is about the abundance of God: God is a benevolent Sower who since the beginning of creation has cast bountiful seeds of goodness and grace upon everything and everyone that has been and ever will be created. God is a gracious Sower who is not stingy with his seed but who casts it freely. God is a magnificent Sower who doesn't distinguish between good soil and not so good soil. No ground and no one is undeserving of God's seeds, of God's blessings that scatter to the far reaches of the earth. This goes along with what Jesus told the crowds earlier in Matthew's Gospel, “He (God) makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.” (Mt. 5:45) Later Jesus says: “Let anyone with ears listen.”

If we have heard this parable, we will find that there is yet another layer that we should consider: as Christians, we are not off the hook when it comes to sowing seed. Part of the plan is that as followers of Christ, we, too, are to announce that God's reign is right here in our midst. Like Lauren, we are to sow God's Word in the places we go and on everyone we meet. It is not up to



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us to determine whether others' soil is arid or rocky or threatened with thorns or by hungry birds. It is not up to us to determine who is worthy or less worthy of the gift that is sown. We are to simply sow and let God the Sower do the rest. **Amen**