

*That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. 2Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. 3And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 5Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. 6But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. 7Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 8Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9Let anyone with ears listen!"*

*18"Hear then the parable of the sower. 19When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. 20As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. 22As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. 23But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."*

In North Dakota they have a piece of farm equipment that I had never encountered in my years of growing up on a farm in Ohio - a rock picker. Fields are full of rocks there. Farmers pull this device with bars spaced far enough apart to let the soil pass through them easily but close enough to keep the rocks from falling back into the soil. After a day's work somewhere on the farm was a pile of rocks and a field that was rock free.

Thistles - sometimes there would be a patch of thistles in the cornfield. My father armed my brother and I with hoes and sent us out to do battle. Though we never defeated the thistles sometimes we limited the damage they could do.

The lane. A number of our fields had a lane along the edge so that tractors and equipment could get to a field that was beyond the front field. Over the years the soil in the lane would become compacted so that even if there was a rain the tractor did not sink down in mud. We never thought of farming the lane - if we did we would have the lane no more.

Do you think people in Jesus time knew about picking up rocks, and hoeing out thistles and maintaining lanes?

Jesus told this parable: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground where they did not have much soil and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose they were scorched and since they had no root they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seed fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!”

We could name it the parable of the silly sower. So much energy and seed wasted. It does not take a genius to recognize the soil that is free of rocks and weeds.

Or the parable of the lazy farmer who did not clear the rocks and battle the thorns.

Many have suggested it is the parable of the extravagant sower – scattering seed everywhere – even where there is not much hope of a harvest.

But as Jesus explanation shows it is really not about a sower and seed and soil at all. It is about the Word and what happens to the word that enters human ears. Like seed sown on the path some hear the Word but do not understand and the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in the heart. And in others the Word is sown and they receive it with joy but the word does not have a deep root in them and when there is trouble or persecution the word withers. And in some who receive the word the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word. And in some the Word produces an abundant harvest.

Even when Jesus was the sower that is what happened. Jesus talking directly to people and some did not get it at all and some got on board for a little while but faded fast and some had arms too full of stuff to have any room for Jesus. It is a wonder that there was any harvest at all.

Or was there? Who was it that stood with Jesus to the end – came to the tomb with joy on Easter morning trusting that Jesus had been raised as he had promised? The men did not come to the tomb at all and the few women who came, came in sorrow and grief. The Word sown in each of them had withered and died - snatched away -

scorched by the sun - choked off. It was not just Jesus who was raised that day but for women and disciples who encountered him, the word sown in their hearts was raised from death to life.

“Let anyone with ears listen!”

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth, it shall not return to me empty but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

Jesus is that Word sent down from heaven who does not return to God empty. He will make a new creation in you where love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and self control grow. Not through picking rocks or pulling thorns but in his word that kills your hope in you and raises up hope in God. It happened on Easter morning – it happens today.

“Let anyone with ears listen.”