

A 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 2014

First Reading: Isaiah 55:10-11 (*Just as the rain makes the earth fruitful, so my word shall do my will.*)

Responsorial Psalm 65 "The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest."

Second Reading: Romans 8:18-23 (*Creation awaits the revelation of the children of God*)

Gospel: Matthew 13:1-23 (*Parable of the Sower*)

♪ Here I am, Lord, is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, *where* you lead me, I will hold your people in my heart. ♪

That song describes the rich soil which Jesus is talking about in this parable. The story would have gotten the attention of his hearer in several ways. First of all, the farmer seems pretty clueless, throwing seed away by planting it on a path, or on rocky ground or in the weeds. The message underneath is that God is unbelievably generous, sending the Word - Jesus - among us - even before we are ready to receive & accept him.

Secondly, the harvest is astounding! - a farmer would be overjoyed to get 10 fold from the harvest, the story includes the shocking numbers of: 30, 60 & 100-fold. The message is that God can do in us and through us works that are beyond our ability to imagine. In the song I began with, I sang "I will go, Lord, *where* you lead me" instead of "If you lead me," as the original composers wrote, because I believe that when God calls me to do something, the Lord is already leading me and giving me what I need to follow through.

For those who believe in Jesus, the seed in the parable is the presence of Christ, the living Word of God, among us. That Word is more of a verb than a noun, as the 1st reading makes very clear when the Lord says, "My word shall not return to me empty, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it." When we are good soil, that is, when we live the word we hear, we become disciples of the living Lord.

And the disciples of Jesus form a church. But this church is more than a building, and more than an institution. It is even more than an assembly of people. It is more like a verb than a noun, it is what happens when believers love one another and go beyond their safe boundaries to care for the poor and transform the world.

When he explains the story to his disciples, Jesus invites us to recognize the obstacles to our hearing and responding to that word. Things like holding on to our own way - which makes us like the path and vulnerable to the evil one, or not having deep roots in the Lord, which makes us like the rocky ground and likely to give up when times are difficult, or the distractions of fear or busyness or greed or insecurity about money, which are like the thorns & weeds that choke out the good seed.

The question this parable asks us is: What kind of soil are you? How receptive are our hearts to receiving the good seed of God's Word - and becoming disciples of the one who plants that seed?

Jesus calls us to be his partners not only in spreading his Good News by our words, but in being his Good News by caring for the poor, being peacemakers in our life situations and in changing the conditions that make poverty & injustice so common in our world

Disciples of Christ all over the world plant the seeds of the Gospel of the reign of God. Real disciples are men & women who heard the call we sang about in the song I began with. Some spend their lives feeding the physical and spiritual hungers of the most neglected and oppressed. They not only feed the hungry and care for the sick, they work for change in the situations and circumstances that cause hunger, disease and poverty. They create the possibility for change in systems and economies by teaching better methods of farming & health care, and sometimes by challenging corporate interests & the government that protect them.

That's why some of them become martyrs, like Sr. Dorothy Stang. She was a sister of Notre Dame de Namur, & spent many years in Brazil. She was murdered in 2005 at the age of 72 because she advocated for the poor and the protection of the rain forest - both of which were being threatened by the greed of the rich and powerful.

We are all called to be missionaries & evangelists by our Baptism - whether we spread the good news to the people who are part of our day to day lives, or go to a foreign country or to another part of our own land. As St. Francis taught by his life and his words, we are all called to "Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary use words."

May we all sing with our lives:

♪ Here I am, Lord, is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, *where* you lead me, I will hold your people in my heart. ♪