

POSSIBILITY PARABLES:

Preparing Your Soil

March 13, 2022

Overarching Theme: 2022 – *The Year of the Lord's Favor* (Luke 4:19)

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

As the world awakens from 2 years of pandemic stupor, the words of Jesus proclaiming "the year of the Lord's favor" is a message whose time has come. This passage from Luke 4 harkens back to the 'year of jubilee' of Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61, a year of a fresh start, a clean slate and reset for everyone who can envision new *possibilities* with God this Lenten season and always.

Reflect on this Scripture: Mark 4:13-20

¹³ And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴ The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. ¹⁶ And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸ And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²⁰ And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

This Week:

Jesus begins the exposition of the parable of the sower with a word of reproach. Anyone who cannot understand this parable will not be able to comprehend the others (vs 13). This remark marks a shift in the Mark in the narrative treatment of Jesus' disciples. From this point on, the disciples will often appear uncomprehending, weak in faith, and even hard hearted (4:40, 6:52, 8:33, 9:32).

The allegorical interpretation of the sower appears to be secondary to the parable itself. The *Gospel of Thomas* shows that the parable circulated without the allegorical interpretation of the soils, which reflects the experiences of the early Christian community. The identification of the seed with the word may have belonged to the initial reading of the parable. The extended types of soil can be lumped together as failures, contrasted with the good soil responsible for the harvest. Since a bountiful harvest is assured, readers should not be no more concerned about rejection of failure than they would be over the seed lost during sowing.

This explanation includes exhortation aimed at members of the community who might abandon the faith they have embraced. The first group never really receive the word because Satan snatches it away. The second, those who lack roots, cannot withstand persecution. The third, those strangled by thorns, lose their faith because concern for wealth and others cares of the world stifle belief. Nevertheless, the word still bears a rich harvest. These examples depict the missionary efforts of the early community: Not only do some reject the message outright, but also others seem to have accepted the message, only to abandon it. Rather than be discouraged by these inevitable failures, Mark's readers should be encouraged by the concluding promise of a rich harvest.

--Adapted from New Interpreters Commentary, Vol VIII, p. 573-574

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. The parable of the sower invites us to reflect on the complexities of faith. Genuine growth in faith can be measured only by the developments in a person's life. Does your faith endure prosperity as well as hardship? Does it yield fruit? Or is it a tool you go looking for in an emergency?
2. Looking back on your faith journey, can you see growth? Or are you struggling in your faith?
3. When have you been the sower in another's life? What soil did you encounter? If not good soil, did you continue to sow or did you chose to give up?
4. What possibilities do you envision with the seed that has been planted in you?
5. Have you decided what you will do with your **Lenten Seed gift**? How is that coming along?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Prayerfully reflect about what you will do with your **Lenten Seed Gift** during this season.
3. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week -- Mark 4:20:
And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."