

St Pius-St Anthony 15th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

Today's foundational parable of Jesus begins, "A sower went out to sow"... That phrase is a starter. The crowd would have perked up it was familiar enough. At that point, the story could have gone off in many directions. Have you ever heard this start, "A man walked into a bar..." You know it is a joke starter...similar to the start "a priest, rabbi and baseball coach went fishing....." Or when I was a kid, there was a popular joke start that went, 'three people were on a plane' like this one, "the president, the secretary of state and a boy scout were in a plane flying to California...and the engine sputters..... "we have to bail, there are four of us (+ pilot), but only three parachutes what are we going to do?" Of course president says, "I am the president, this great country needs me, I must go ahead, so he grabs a chute and jumps. Then the secretary state (it was by name-Henry Kissinger-somehow when I was a kid Kissinger was thought of as a wonder of the world) He begins stuttering, "I advise the president, involved in all the diplomacy between our countries especially now w/ cold war & Vietnam, the country needs me by him." So he grabs and jumps..... and then the pilot looks back at the Boy Scout, and says, "It is just us two, son, I think you need to get the last chute, you are young and promising; remember this day". And then Boy Scout, said back calmly, "Don't worry friend, I'll remember this day, we are both going to make it out. We have two chutes: the smartest man in the world just jumped out of a plane with my backpack!"

But my point is the starter phrase of this 'known' joke method, like "A man walked into a bar" ...Which you have heard the twist on that haven't you? It goes, "A man walked into a bar, and said 'ouch'! "

But really, we hear in the gospel today that Jesus taught in catchy parables. It was a teaching method of his, to use 'story' to deliver home his point-his message. So today, he tells this foundational or starter parable for us (a parable to help us through understanding all parables); a method to break open the meaning of his teaching. Interestingly, on only two occasions does Jesus go into the detail explaining the component-parts of his parables. Today is the first (Sower and seed) and next week we will hear the only other one, the parable of the weeds and wheat. After these two, Jesus will simply teach parables and his student-disciples will study and interpret-take what they can. But with this first one Jesus goes through step by step and opens its meaning to us. In the text itself (these first 3 verses of Matthew 13) we find our clue as to how foundational this parable is to understanding Jesus himself. The parable of course, starts out verse 3 of Jesus saying, 'A sower went out to sow...', but that totally echoes the first verse of the chapter. Matthew sets up this whole encounter by saying, 13:1 "On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea" To teach...Jesus is planting

seeds; he is giving, what can grow fruit within us, if we receive, take in-shelter, water and cultivate that precious seed from his hand. Jesus is the sower. The seed is his word. We need to ask, "Which soil am I?" I believe our reaction to parables should always be asking, "You trying to say something to me?" Jesus always answers us, 'YES'. We are in it. With this one, we are the ground. The challenge to figure out is what kind of ground are we? Are we the fertile, fruitful ground for God's word! Looking at other parts/elements of this parable, I think two definite details are clear. 1) The seed is good, and 2) the sower-God is patient. This strikes me so deeply because only a sower very confident in the pedigree of his own seed would even allow a seed to hit a path, or on the rocks or among a thorn bush. But God wants even there, something to grow as a start. And such a planter (God) is patient. (Maybe this time (God hopes) the seed will make it to fruit even among rocks or thorns). So on God's side in this parable, again we can say absolutely, His seed is always good. I imagine we have all had the experience of planting a packet of seeds and maybe nothing even shoots up through the soil. Or has this happened to you, that wrong seed is packaged and what you think should grow turns out not to be what is in that pack. My problem this year-back when Covid hit, I thought I want something to grow out of this down-time, so I planted all kinds of seed. Some I bought in package, some I had saved along the way, and I planted it all in pots to start. Problem became what is what.... I had some tree seeds, vegetable seeds, flower seeds, so put what where?

And what came up and what didn't? But with God's seed, it is all good, and will all grow to bear fruit. And a second point from God's side of this parable is that God is a patient sower. He sows and waits. He cultivates, waters and nurtures it and waits for fruit. That often is my problem. I have been known to plant, and after not seeing green shoot, go ahead and replant only to discover that as I turn the ground, then I see just about to have broken through the surface the seed sprout. Great. I wouldn't have to try again, had I been a little more patient. Or a friend of mine who delivered a pot of flowers to a neighbor to brighten their porch and the neighbor called to thank them for the leaf lettuce that was all growing up around the flower stems –Damon had impatiently given up on his bed of lettuce and moved dirt to pots for quicker growing flowers to give away" But again, our sower is patient, (thank Him). Jesus offers this same message in a later parable I call the good gardener (Luke 13:6-9), where an owner says cut that fruitless fig tree down, and the gardener-Jesus says, 'give me a year with it' let me cultivate it, if no fruit still in a year, then sure we cut it down.' But thank Jesus, he tends sacrificially one more year with it. So, if seed is even allowed to falls to a path (I've seen plant out of a sidewalk or those trees that grow along parkway out side of hill-rock), or among thorns or rocks by the sower that tells me how patient God is with us. Or another story, I remember a lady telling me (now she was about 92 at the time) so we are talking about her in about 1920's, she and her sister were given the job

of planting the cucumber patch. I got the impression the by-hand way planting was slow and cumbersome to actually planting each seed with a little hand spade from a bag of seeds. But she said that after being at it a while, several long rows; they figured that when they ran out of seed the job was done, so as they got more & more tired, they would throw a bunch of seed over by the fence and rock piles at the edge of plot. She said afterward though, she felt bad every time her dad would comment to friends as they visited on the porch, "Wonder why those cucumbers are all vined up over on those rocks and into the ditch?"

But again, all parables involve us. We are in them. And with this foundational one today, we need to ask ourselves, "What ground am I for God's good seed? Am I the good soil?" Do I receive, hold and nurture God's good word to grow within my life, and then to bear and share its fruit to others?" Absolutely we are so thankful, that God the sower is patient, and that His seed sown in us is good, yet on our end, are we the fertile and receptive soil to accept His word fruitfully to let it grow in us?