

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23      The Sower  
July 16, 2023

I have mentioned a few times the discussion group of which I am a part. Each month we read a book and then meet on Zoom for conversation. This month the title of the book was, Transformed, by an English chemist named Nick Lane.

The whole book is an explanation of life in terms of its chemistry. At times reading it was a little comical because the in depth explanations were expressed as if they could actually make sense to someone who was not a chemist. I learned all about the Krebs Cycle, a cyclical chain of chemical reactions that are the building blocks of life.

Did you know that there are about 30 billion cells in your body, and in each cell there are more than a billion metabolic reactions each second? You thought you were just sitting still. That means 100 billion trillion reactions. One would never guess. For the author, that is life's meaning.

I have found similar dynamics in other books; in philosophy, economics; and I am sure the same is true for legal scholars explaining finer points of the law, or perhaps computer savants trying to convey the inner workings of binary code; as well as countless others in other areas of expertise. It is possible to hear them as if they are speaking in tongues. It is difficult to learn from them, even for the experts.

Even theology can seem this way, from standard religious phrases like, "accepting Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior, Christ crucified, New Creation, anything about the Holy Spirit, and other expressions that must sound distant and without meaning to many hearers; all the way to the highest echelons of contemporary and historical theology; Aquinas, Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Tillich, Barth, Niebuhr, Moody, Graham, including feminist and liberation theologians. In a variety of ways they all sound meaningless. I think I could quote them all in a kind of comedy routine of the highest display of esoteric absurdity. Or at least it seems that way.

Instead I ask that they be given a break . . . not only the theologians, but even ourselves whenever we engage in religious speak for the lack of a better language to talk about the things of God.

The Bible uses many different mediums to reveal divine mysteries. There are stories that taken together provide a pathway to the understanding of the meaning of our lives (one that, frankly, chemistry fails to provide). There are images; king, lawyer, priest, prophet, shepherd, that are meant to help us on our way.

The Bible presents the habit of Jesus speaking in parables, and in Matthew we are given an explanation of why. By their nature parables speak of something hidden in the nature of things. Or parables hide something in the nature of things. It is hard to tell which Jesus is trying to do, reveal or hide. Jesus later

quotes from the 78th Psalm but it is helpful to mention it to this affect here.

“I will open my mouth with a parable;  
I will utter hidden things, things from of old.”

In between the parable and its explanation, Jesus quotes from Isaiah as he explains to his disciples:

“Though seeing, they do not see;  
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.”

“You will be ever hearing, but never understanding  
you will be ever seeing, but never perceiving.

For this people’s heart has become calloused, they hardly hear with their ears and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts, *and turn, and I would heal them.*”

In the text today is another agricultural image that is pressed into the service of God’s Word; the Sower. We see the image of a sower, and an extravagant one at that (not an extravagant image of a sower, but an image of an extravagant sower).

Employing a “scatter” sowing technique, the sower goes out scattering seed, but not only in the fields where the tilling of the ground had been successfully completed and the rocks and thistles cleared, but also

on the road and the rocky places and among thorns where no rational farmer would expect to find good soil.

This parable is an allegory. God is the wasteful sower, and pursues a relationship with people. The gospel is the seed, and the hearers, even we ourselves, are the soil. Some make better soil than others, relationships proceed accordingly.

I am sure that most of the audience would have been lost, wondering about this waste of seed sown in places seeds don’t germinate. This is a parable of the astonishing grace of God who finds good soil in nooks and crannies where others would not bother look. And to the miracle of God’s grace we must add that even sometimes good soil is found in strange places.

The confusion, requiring Jesus to offer his disciples an interpretation, does not stem from an inability to understand allegory, but rather from the wonder at the waste of seed in places not likely to produce. This “waste” is good news. It means there is hope for us.

The parables may hide truths about God, or they may reveal hidden truths about God. The life and death of Jesus, on the other hand, happened in the open for all to see. It is a story that can be briefly told without much confusing detail.

Jesus was betrayed by one of his disciples, and abandoned by the rest. He was arrested and tried in a kangaroo court, in which the outcome had already

been decided. He was executed by crucifixion, and then raised on the third day.

He was then proclaimed as the essential self-expression of God in history. There has been, nonetheless, a chronic failure to understand, and it is a universal failure; after all, how can God's self-expression in history be the victim of capital punishment? How can grain grow on a sidewalk or among the rocks? 100 billion trillion reaction you say? Humility is required because we also must confess a failure to understand.

Jesus is proclaimed in this way nonetheless as we stumble around the math and science of things, the biology and the chemistry of things, the philosophy and history, even the theology, searching for the meaning of the reality set before us.

Yet Jesus speaks to his disciples as if this failure to perceive and understand *is the point of it all*. The larger biblical telling of the grand story, however, reveals the opposite to be true. God's purpose is to reveal grace, not to hide it; to reveal love and justice to us, not to hide it, to reveal mercy and reconciliation to us, not to hide it, but to get us to look in the right place for it.

It is made known in Christ, who lived and died, yes, and is raised to new life . . . and with that message in hand . . .

The Sower . . . went out to sow . . .

The Sower still . . . goes out to sow.

May we receive this glorious message, each with the understanding of the heart, and may we turn and be healed . . .

[Back](#)

[Home](#)