

Vibrant and Fruitful

The Parable of the Sower, Mark 4:1-20

Earlier this summer, we killed about a third of the grass in our backyard with a homemade slip and slide. Just a few hours of sun and heat filtered through the clear 6 mil plastic was enough to fry airplane landing strips into our yard. We were slightly shocked - we thought the short amount of time that the plastic was on the yard would have spared our grass, but we were sadly mistaken. We thought we were being careful in moving the plastic sheeting as soon as the kids were done playing on it, but our efforts were in vain...at least we thought so. But I'll come back to the grass shortly.

In Jesus' Parable of the Sower in Mark 4, he describes seed that is sown in 4 different types of landscaping. Some seed just falls on the path beside the field and birds immediately consume it. Some seed falls on rocky ground, which grows quickly, but withers away just as fast when the sunshine hits it. Some seed falls among thorns, where it starts to grow, but it gets choked out and overwhelmed by the weeds and thorns, and it dies. But the rest of the seed falls into good soil that is tended to and maintained, and that seed grows strong and plentiful.

Away from the crowds, Jesus explains the meaning of this parable to the disciples in Mark 4:13-20. The first three seed/soil examples represent people who receive Jesus' message and respond in ways ranging from immediate rejection to brief, shallow excitement to loss of interest when the things of this world seem more fulfilling. And the fourth group of seeds, the one I'm focusing on, represent people who fully believe in Jesus' and take God's word seriously and seek to glorify Him with their lives.

Now, back to our pitiful grass situation. After a couple of weeks, fresh green shoots started popping up again amongst the brown, brittle strands of grass that had been victim to our inadvertently deadly greenhouse. And within a month the grass had almost fully grown back to its normal, plush state. Even though it had been severely damaged, there was a good enough foundation in our yard that the grass was able to come back to life with a little time and patience and watering. I think this grass is a lot like the fourth group of seeds that get planted in Mark 4.

Jesus paints a picture of plants that are vibrant and verdant and bear so much fruit, which is how he wants us to live as his followers. He wants our lives to show fruit, like Galatians 5:22-23. That doesn't mean our lives are easy, or that we don't have times (often time after time) where we feel beaten down or defeated. Death and illness can consume us or our loved ones. Financial catastrophes can rock our little worlds. Sin can creep in and devastate us. Life can seem impossible to deal with because we can get so bombarded

with terrible things that we can look and feel like we're dead and unfruitful for a time. But looking and feeling like lifeless, fragile weeds doesn't mean that's what we truly are.

If you are that fourth type of soil sown with the seed of God's truth, you can tap into the True Vine (John 15:1-11) and build back on that solid rock foundation (Matthew 7:24) of Jesus and rely on his strength; you can thrive again. "Your joy may be full," even in the midst of awful circumstances (John 15:11). It will most likely take some time, and it won't be as easy as just letting some grass regrow, but God makes it possible. I pray that you all continue to build on that foundation, that you sense the strength the Holy Spirit gives us, and that you can be vibrant and fruitful, no matter where you find yourself...and don't use clear plastic tarp as a slip and slide.

-Anna Elkins