

2 Tim. 1:1-8
Psalm 96
Mark 4: 1-20

Homily for January 26, 2022

I begin with an imaginary trip to the Holy Land (Oh, how I wish it were so!)
We are near the Sea of Galilee.

Walking along a path near the water, we see an opening in the bushes, where-- to our surprise-- we see rocks that have been painted purple. (Right! ---purple). They mark the way forward.

We follow and we are on a path of dry grass with low trees.

Then the ground drops away and now we are on the shoreline. It is a bay on the Sea of Galilee. A natural amphitheater with the Mt. of the Beatitudes and other hills around the bay. Sound easily travels over the water with its unique acoustics. This is called the Bay of Parables. It is likely where Jesus taught from the boat.

Today's parable can help us to appreciate that there are some exact places where a particular scripture text happened. This could be one.

We picture Jesus sitting in a boat just off the shore. We are in with the crowd on the shore listening. We can hear him perfectly.

As he speaks, we look around. Along the path and the ground where we stand, there is rocky ground, fertile ground, and even thorn bushes. He is talking about the ground and his talk is God's Word.

At the Bay of Parables, Jesus told the Parable of the Sower. It is a real life story. Jesus is a down-to-earth story teller. The people get it ----at some level.
I get it---at some level.

We can further imagine what He did not say: "Think about a path, rocky ground, thorn bushes..." More likely he might have said, "Look at that path-- see the birds...Look at the rocky soil...the thorn bushes..." Maybe he even gestured in our direction, pointing to the path, the rocks, the bushes...

Then, he talks about seeds and grounds.

2.

The Gospel is grounded in real life. It was then and it is now.
Real life--- but with the constant, ever present, insistent theme of all Jesus' preaching: the Kingdom of God --The Reign of God.

There is where the mystery lies in every parable.
The secret of all life is hidden in ordinary events.

Even more dominant in this central theme of Jesus' teaching is that the mystery of life and the Reign of God are happening right now—in Jesus, in the listeners then, and now. It is not yet complete but happening.

Everything Jesus said and did, his very person, communicated the Reign of God as that great dream and reality right in front of us.

In the teaching of Parables, Jesus saw in everything a divine Spirit embodied in the whole universe. A spirit that powerfully brings us together in common work. A plan of growth and development resulting in communion of all creation. He spoke about it, looked for it, died for it.

We do, too, every time we pray: "Your Kingdom come."

What is it like? The parables give clues to this hidden (yet in our midst) mystery. It is for us to discover the secrets.

Parables are about many things: a tree with all kinds of birds nesting, sheep called by name, a vine full of branches, a net full of fish, a table that includes all.

Even about families getting along or a community striving forward withstanding obstacles and struggles.

Today's parable considers different grounds that receive seeds. There is potential to grow but also conditions that prevent growth.

Just a reminder:

We know there are two moments in the learning process.

3.

The first moment: the teacher teaches. The lesson is proclaimed to us. The student is in a passive moment listening.

The second moment: the student mulls it over, makes connections, begins to make the teaching their own.

No longer passive, but actively claiming what was taught.

The importance of the second moment is critical in the realm of parables. This is because in the genius of Gospel parables, there are layers of meaning that will not be discovered by the passive learner. It is the second moment that uncovers the secrets and impacts our lives.

This is true in the teaching today as it offers some layers of thought. Let's look at layers.

We might be used to thinking of different grounds or soil as representing different types of persons who either ignore the seeds of God's word, or are a shallow person with no depth, or

the one who at first takes it in but then is distracted with many other things or finally, one who is receptive and does the work of growing.

Can we instead see the whole of the grounds in ourselves and our community?
Maybe looking back over our lives individually and congregationally over time,
we have recognized the different grounds and the reception (or not) of the seeds.

I will leave it to each of us to ponder our own individual layers.

In this moment let's look at our IHM story.

Fr. Gillet received the Word as he looked over the great field of missionary work and began
(and we know this line by heart) leaving it to God to grow and prosper.

And so it did.

4.

Over the decades we don't deny that there were grounds in individuals and in community that were hard and unyielding. Grounds that stubbornly refused the seed. Clinging to old ways, allowing cares and rules to impede our vision, not clearing the rocks that were blocking new initiatives. Even times when we could not withstand the unbearable heat of suffering and hopes were dried up.

Yes, we had obstacles some within and some not of our own doing.

But what about the fertile ground?

The seed was planted so firmly that fruit abounded first, invisibly beneath the soil the seed out roots to form new seedlings. Then new missions, new foundations, so that one strand of wheat that produces 30 new seeds become the mother root to more stems of 30 + 30+ plus 30 ...all the way to 100.

This happened over 176 years. And it is still happening.

I bring up the most recent and splendid example: Marygrove
is not the Kingdom of God showing such wonders and marvels in the emergence of new pathways? The history is rich with those who laid the foundation, overcoming obstacles, struggled through difficult eras, yet produced fruit beyond measure. And it is still happening.

The mystery is this:

Every parable when we search the layers, the depths of meaning, the secrets, we are led by the Spirit to Jesus, the human face of God who is the Word that is spoken in our hearts and revealing the Reign of God within us, around us and in the Cosmos.

Today, let's turn our faces to the boat on the Sea of Galilee. Let's look into the face of the Divine Sower, who will not let the seed settle anywhere except in our hearts and ---always the searcher ---will find the good fertile ground.

We can pray today with young Katie who with a sigh prayed "that we will learn all the secrets of the parables."

Lord, hear our prayer!