

Blessed Are the Dirtbags

Matthew 13:1-23

March 7, 2004

Peter Hiett

[Children's Sermon:]

Peter: Hey, kids, are you hungry? How would you like some apples—some big, red, delicious apples? Awesome! because I have an apple seed. This thing can make tons of apples! *Go!*

Kids: You need to put it in dirt.

Peter: Thanks, I have some dirt right here. I'll plant the seed . . .

Kids: It needs water.

Peter: OK, we'll try some water . . . I'll check and see how it's doing now . . . Dang it! Nothing.

Kids: It takes a long time.

Peter: How long does it take? Days? So we have to wait *days* for it to grow? Well, I thought this seed was busted, but you've got to bury it and water it, and it takes days until it starts growing. Did you know that the Word of God is like a seed? People think the Bible doesn't work. They listen to the story, they read the Bible, they learn about Jesus, and then they say, "It doesn't work." But maybe if the Word is like a seed, you have to bury it deep inside of you, and then over a long time it grows inside of you and changes you. Have you ever looked at a cheeseburger when you're really, really hungry?

Kids: Yes!

Peter: Did you say, "That cheeseburger's not working!"

Kids: No . . .

Peter: Why? Because you have to take the cheeseburger and put it inside you, right? And it changes you from the inside out. Maybe the story of Jesus is like that. Let's pray:

Lord, thank you so much that you're kind of like a seed, your story's like a seed, and your Bible's like a seed. Lord, I pray you would help us to not just rub it on our skin or put it on our T-shirts, but to ingest it deep inside so that it would change us like food and make us different from the inside out. In Jesus' name, amen.

It's time to preach the Word. Over the years, I've been taught a great deal about preaching. Early on as a Young Life leader, I was taught to keep the message clear, concise, and simple: State it, restate it, and tell them what to do. The idea was to present a concise, logical argument from which the listener could not escape, and then force the point of decision. That's good sales.

I used to sell Kirby vacuum cleaners (for a week), and I was instructed to say, "Your carpets are a valuable investment. Dirt destroys your carpet. Why, you'd be *insane* not to protect your investment in your carpet, wouldn't you agree, ma'am? Kirby is the Cadillac of vacuums. Act now and seal the deal."

In college on a campus ministries retreat, we were instructed in spreading the Word . . . basically to say, “Your soul is valuable. Dirt destroys your soul. You’d be *insane* not to care for your eternal soul! Only Jesus can clean it. Act now and seal the deal.” We’d practice our technique on a crowd and then come back to the hotel where they gave out rewards for those who got the most decisions. I was really frustrated, because I got none. I figured maybe I couldn’t make it work, or maybe it didn’t work; maybe the Word didn’t work. Maybe the Word was busted.

Matthew 13:1:

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat there; and the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched; and since they had no root they withered away. Other seeds fell upon thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.”

“He who has ears, let him hear.” That’s no way to end a pitch! He’d make a lousy vacuum cleaner salesman or TV evangelist. Yet He has had some influence on this world. Alice Gray writes:

You can offer your ideas to others as bullets or as seeds. You can shoot them, or sow them; hit people in the head with them, or plant them in their hearts. Ideas used as bullets will kill inspiration and neutralize motivation. Used as seeds, they take root, grow, and become reality in the life in which they are planted.

Well, that sounds a bit like a beatnik greeting card. So maybe we can blow it off . . . but *Jesus* is another matter. He talks about seed as well, and in a little while He’ll tell us the seed is the “word of the kingdom,” “the word of God” (in the gospel of Luke) or simply “the word” (in Mark). A sower sows the seed, and it lands on four soils.

1. Some seed lands on the path. That’s the hard ground, between the fields, that has been shaped to accommodate people. And the seed doesn’t penetrate. The birds come and devour it.
2. Some of the seed falls on rocky soil. The common problem in Palestine was shallow soil on top of limestone and siltstone.

That’s the problem in my front yard: The developer’s landscaper just needed the grass to look good until he got his check. So he put the sod down right on top of the rock. It looked great for a while, but it withered in the summer sun. It had no depth of root.

For the back yard, I rented a big, old rototiller and hauled in tons of cow manure. I had to bust some of the rock with a pickax, and then I just rototilled the living daylight out of it and the

manure *into* it. Stuff grows great in my back yard now, because it's full of crap, and the soil's been plowed deep.

Some folks like to keep the Gospel as shallow as possible (simple). And it *is* as simple as this: *Jesus*. Yet, you see, He likes to grow deep. Some people love easy sermons, signs and wonders, and nice thoughts. They grow quick and green. But when tribulation and persecution come, they're offended and fall away. They're scandalized ("scandalizo" is the Greek verb).

3. Other seed fell on thorns. In the next section, Jesus explains to His disciples that the thorns are the "deceitfulness of riches" and the "cares of this world"—literally, the "anxieties of this age." These are people who take the nightly news *very seriously*. They take commercials seriously and politics seriously.

But the *real* news is a seed—a word. Take it seriously. It looks insignificant in this world, small, and powerless. You might find it in a goat farm in China or in missionaries backpacking in Nepal. That's the real news: a seed.

So I try not to worry too much about politics, or preach politics and the news. It is important to vote and debate and get involved. It's just that I think it's far more fruitful to plant a seed and then not choke the seed with the anxieties of the age.

4. Well, the last soil is good soil that bears much fruit. End of message.

And now we want to say, "OK, Jesus, nice message. We get the point. We think you could have picked a better metaphor for us than *dirt*, but nice message. Press for the decision and close the deal. Say, 'Come forward and make a decision to be high quality dirt.'" That's the way we'd preach. But this is what He says: "He who has ears, let him hear." Next verse (vs. 10):

Then the disciples [who obviously understood sales and marketing better than Jesus] came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" [It was right before Jesus died that the disciples came to Him and said, "At last you're saying something clearly!" That's after three years.] And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets [mysteries] of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to him who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says: 'You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them.'"

That's brutal! And that's a toned-down version of what Jesus says in Mark and Luke. Here He says He speaks in parables *because* "seeing they don't see." In Mark and Luke, He says He speaks in parables *so that* "seeing they may not see." In this version of Isaiah (the Greek Septuagint) quoted by Jesus in Matthew, Isaiah prophesies that the people have closed their eyes

lest they should see with their eyes. In the Hebrew original, Isaiah is told to shut their eyes with his preaching and make their hearts dull and ears heavy.

Now, a tired preacher might say, “Awesome . . . I can do that.” But that’s not what Isaiah is about. He’s a great preacher. Read the rest of Isaiah 6, and you find that God is telling Isaiah to “preach ‘em down” . . . “Until their cities are laid waste and their houses are empty and their land is desolate.” To preach ‘em down “to a stump.”

Then in verse 13 the Lord says, “So the holy seed will be its stump.” Jesus is preaching like Isaiah, preaching Israel down to a stump. The stump is a root, and the root is the holy seed.

Well, some are supposed to *not* hear. That’s the plan.

So it’s not like they judge Jesus’ Word;
His Word judges them.

It’s not like Jesus is preaching for a decision;
It’s like His preaching *is* the decision about them.

The Word divides, and with it the sower decides.
And that’s what we (our flesh) hate about this parable.

- Dirt just sits there and does nothing. *Dirt*.
- Dirt doesn’t decide; the sower decides.
- Dirt isn’t even alive, but the seed is, isn’t it?—dead, but alive. “Let him who has ears hear.”

Well, maybe somewhere along the line they chose to close their ears, or should I say they were chosen to chose to close their ears. Whatever the case, the point remains that Jesus is talking to dirt. Why? Well, perhaps His Word is actually doing something to the dirt, like a hoe, rake, shovel, or dynamite. Unlike our words, perhaps His Word is living and active, piercing and digging to the division of soul and spirit, discerning the heart. Perhaps His Word is judging the dirt or doing something else to the dirt.

He speaks to bad dirt and good dirt. His disciples are, or will be, good dirt, but they’re still dirt. So I don’t think He’s asking them to decide or do anything. Why’s He speaking? Verse 16 . . .

“But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

“Blessed are you, my good dirt.”

“Blessed are your eyes and ears.”

“Blessed are you.”

Maybe He just wants them to know they’re *blessed*.

Sometimes I talk to my kids, even preach to my kids, but there’s no painful decision. The decision has already been made. There’s nothing for them to do. It’s already been done. There’s

nothing to buy; it's already been bought. Sometimes I'll say, "I love you. I think you're awesome. I'm nuts about you! Why am I telling you? I just want you to know." That's *good news*: gospel.

Sometimes I talk to my wife that way. I'll say, "Susan, I really love you." And if she says, "What do you want?" it means I'm not speaking gospel—good news, or it means that her heart is hard and she won't receive my word.

"Sweetheart, you're awesome. I love you. Thanks for marrying me. If I had it to do over, I'd ask you to marry me *sooner*. No I don't want anything; I just wanted you to know."

Funny thing is, those words often bear the most fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, Jonathan, Elizabeth, Becky, and Coleman. The Greek word for seed is "sperma" or "sporos," all the same word group, which translate the Hebrew "zera" or "zāra." Biblically, seed is sperm, and sperm is seed.

So, Bride of Christ, what does Jesus want? Well, He's not telling us just simply so that we'll decide something, do something, or produce something—fruit. Then it wouldn't be *gospel*. He's telling us because He just wants us to know. Yet if we receive His love, receive His Word—His Seed—His Gospel, don't be surprised if there's fruit!—one hundred fold, sixty fold, thirty fold. Whatever the case, maybe He just wants you to know you're blessed. He says to His disciples, "Blessed are your eyes and your ears."

But now, you may say, "But I don't know if I'm a disciple. I've got some thorny issues, anxiety of the age. I've got some hard places deep down inside." Have you ever met anybody with *no* anxieties, cares, or hard places? Certainly these disciples had them . . . thorns, rocks, anxieties . . . soon they will abandon Jesus, and Peter will deny Him three times out of deep anxiety and a hard place.

Well, I think the disciples' soil changed. But *they* didn't change it. You can try to change your soil, but maybe you can't change it. However, I bet that sower farmer could. Maybe you could ask him. "To him who has words, let him ask."

But now, if the farmer changed your soil, what would that look like?

Well, first, all the people might leave. You'd no longer be the popular way but a deserted path, alone in hope of the seed.

Secondly, the farmer might tear away all the thorns: all your wealth and influence, that is, the anxiety of the age. Then he might dump a bunch of manure on you.

Remember the parable of the fig tree that wouldn't bear? The servant is told to dung it. The farmer might dung you and take a pickax to your stony heart, and then get a big, old rototiller and just rototill the Hell out of you, down deep. Maybe God is just rototilling the Hell out of this world. Read the Revelation. I think you realize that He is. It looks like wrath, and it is. But not on us, for on us who are being saved, it's *good news*—grace which bears much fruit.

Years ago, Gretchen Palmer went through a painful divorce. For therapy, she rototilled. At staff meeting, we'd say, "How's it going, Gretchen?" and she'd say, "Well, I've been doing a lot of rototilling." If I thought she was mad at me, I'd just ask, "You been rototilling on account of me?" See, Gretchen took all her wrath and poured it out on her rototiller. And when she did, her garden bore great fruit.

I wonder if God has a rototiller and a garden.

Well, Jesus' disciples are blessed. Yet He says they're going to lose everyone (Matthew 10:21). They will be hated by all. They'll lose everything and be flogged, killed, and persecuted.

On a Friday, they'll be plowed as deep as any plow can go. Jesus knows this, and He says, "Guys, you are blessed, precious, priceless. And I just want you to know."

So perhaps the farmer can plow the soil and clear the soil. Perhaps the disciples have some good soil. And to him who has, more good soil will be given. Jesus knows they're going to get more soil, and it will hurt a lot. So He just wants them to know: "Guys, you're blessed."

Do you ever wonder, "What's wrong?" You seek God's Word but:

1. You feel lonely and unpopular.
2. It feels like a blade is cutting deep in your heart.
3. You're losing everything. You feel like a bag of dust and crap.

What's wrong?

Perhaps you're blessed. He wants you to know. "Blessed are you, my disciples." Next verse (vs. 18):

"Hear then the parable of the sower."

(Did you notice Jesus makes them hear? He makes them good soil.)

"When any one hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart; this is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away [he is scandalized]. As for what was sown among thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is he who hears the word and understands it [assimilates it or stands under it]; he indeed bears fruit, and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

So what is the seed?—"The word of the kingdom." Jesus preaches "the kingdom," so it's like, probably this parable and whatever Jesus says. But more than *what* He says, it's *who* He is. A seed is the presence of the future. A seed is a promise. A seed carries life in its bosom, and though it dies, it lives. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"

Jesus is the way,
the truth,
the life,
the seed,
the Word.

And what is the soil? Human hearts. Yet some are hard like stone. In the beginning, God reached down to the earth and took some “aphar” (it means worthless stuff, dust, or dirt), and then He breathed into it His breath of life, and man—Adam—became “nephesh”—a living soul, a person. Yet tempted by the snake, Adam and Eve tried to create themselves and died. But God promised a seed that would one day crush the head of the Serpent. God promised Abraham a seed and David a seed. Isaiah prophesied the seed. Jesus preached to people waiting for the promised seed. Galatians 3:16 says Jesus *is* the promised, holy seed.

So what are we? What is a person? What is a nephesh?

Well, in the first instance (or soil), I guess a person is not a person, just dirt. For the Word never penetrates and germinates. So Satan comes and devours the seed—the Word. Yet Isaiah says that the Word will not return void but will accomplish what the Lord pleases: judgment or perhaps more.

Birds often swallow seeds; it’s by design. They digest the fruit, but the seed passes through their system and comes out in their droppings—the dung; that is, it comes out encased in fertilizer.

I wonder if God even uses Satan to make this world fertile for His seed. If so, that must really tick Satan off! No wonder he’s so angry all the time.

Well, in the second, third, and fourth soils, the seeds germinate and form a plant. It’s interesting the way Jesus then constructs His sentences. He says, “As for what was sown [which He told us is the Word], this is he who . . . whatever.” The seed has become an individual person. The seed has animated some dirt. That’s a plant, and that’s a person.

The plants in the second and third soils are unfruitful, yet they are persons. They are dirt that’s come to life, dirt that contains spirit.

- Maybe they’re, like, the first Adam and need to be born again.
- Maybe they’re born again but are just not fruitful.
- Maybe Jesus will dung ‘em, dig around the base, remove the thorns, and revive them. I don’t know, but like the fourth soil, they live.

A plant is dirt come to life: dirt animated by a seed, because the seed dies and gives its life to the dirt. You could say the Word (the seed) becomes flesh. But a plant is dirt surrendered to a seed. A real person is dirt surrendered to *the* Seed.

So what does Jesus want from us?—

Dirt surrendered;
 hearts surrendered;
 sin surrendered;
 shame surrendered.

Someone said farmers don’t vacuum the dirt out of the garden to prepare for the seed. They don’t clean the dirt; they expose the dirt to the seed, and the seed turns the dirt into the harvest—a harvest of faith, mercy, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness.

Satan tried to get us to hide the dirt from the seed, turn it into pavement, bury it deep and hard, or cover it with thorns and neurosis. Satan says:

My goodness, you've got dirt! You'd better hide it from the seed. My goodness, David, you slept with Bathsheba. My goodness, Paul, you're a murderer of Christians. My goodness, Peter, you denied your Lord in His hour of greatest need. You had better not show that dirt to the seed. Imagine what would happen if you showed *that* dirt to the Great Seed—the Root—the Christ! You'd better hide the dirt, you wretched dirtbag.

And Jesus says, "Blessed are you, my precious dirtbags." That's the twelfth beatitude in the gospel of Matthew. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the hungry for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those persecuted for righteousness' sake, the reviled for me, and blessed is he who takes no offense at me." Now #12: "Blessed are the confused, tilled, plowed, dunged, and hungry for seed. Blessed are the dirtbags."

The thirteenth beatitude belongs to a guy named Peter. In Matthew 16:17, Peter says, "You're the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus says, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." It was a word of the kingdom taking root in fertile soil . . . just *some* soil, for we know Peter still had rocks and big thorns. Yet Peter is blessed.

The Farmer will make His soil good. Peter's thorns will be pulled and his hard places plowed. On a Friday, Peter is broken, dunged, and sifted by Satan. Yet Peter bears fruit. You're the fruit. We call it the Church.

That Friday was Good Friday,
the passion of the Christ,
Christ crucified on the cross.

1. On the cross, Satan swallowed the wrong seed, and the Seed destroyed him, even as it was sown in all the world. *Fertile*.
2. On the cross, this world is judged—plowed. The cross is the "scandalon"—crisis—of this world.
3. On the cross, the thorns are defeated, the curse is broken.
 - On the cross, the wrath of God is poured out on God. And Matthew records that the ground shook and the rocks were broken.
 - On the cross, the Word is revealed: Jesus the Christ and Him crucified. The Word is revealed and the Word is God and God is love. He earnestly wants us to know and believe.
 - On the cross, the Sower sows His seed deep in the heart of the earth, three days and three nights:

His seed
His body broken and blood shed
The fruit of the tree
The harvest of the earth

The bread and wine

And He says, “Take and eat.”

In John 12, Jesus says, “The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Christ’s cross is a tree. I suspect it grows from the stump. The stump is the root of David, the root is a seed, and the seed is the Word “by whom and through whom all things are created.”

You know, some seed is so powerful it grows an immense tree . . .

. . . the root of the tree so strong it can break cement pathways.

. . . the root so deep it can bust open the deepest rocks.

. . . the branches so broad they can choke out every thorn.

The great Farmer tills the soil, and He uses His seed. He uses His tree. Jesus is the Seed. He ends His parable saying:

“As for what was sown on good soil, this is he who hears the word and understands it; he indeed bears fruit, and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

We ingest the Seed and then speak the Seed. There is great power in the Seed.

So maybe it’s not how you speak (your technique). You don’t *make* the Word work; the Word makes *you* work. Maybe it’s not *how* you speak so much as *who* you speak. You can only speak Him because He has first spoken you. He’s the Word, the Seed, the Love of God. He’s quite capable, and He *works*.

A couple weeks ago at my small group, Mary Rader told us that she got a strange phone call that week. A voice said, “Is this Mary Skinner Rader?” And she said yes. “Well, I don’t know if you remember me, but my name is Alan Kendrick from the University of Miami.” All at once, Mary remembered this guy. She had shared her umbrella with him in a storm.

Mary had told us about that time in her life (twenty-two years before), when she was part of a campus ministry big on evangelism and doing it right, making it work, presenting the clear message, and driving to a decision. But she’d been very insecure and legalistic and felt like she had been a failure—unfruitful.

A few weeks ago, she also was feeling rather unfruitful and definitely plowed up and dunged on.

So the voice said, “Mary, you shared your umbrella with me and told me about Jesus.” Mary remembered that. She told us that although she had been pretty messed up and confused, she really did love Jesus and just wanted this guy to know. It wasn’t part of an outreach program. She said she thought she just rambled, and she didn’t “seal the deal.” When he left, he had looked at her like she was nuts, and she never heard from him again.

Now the voice said something like, “Mary, I tracked down your number because I’m a Christian now. I wasn’t then, and I did think you were strange. But while I was having my

devotions, I just had this urge to call you and tell you. You see, I just wanted you to know. Twenty-two years ago, you planted a seed.”

Well, Mary planted *the* Seed (Revelation 19): the Rider on the white horse, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Word. And He *will not* return void.

So on the night He was betrayed (the very same day He was buried deep in the heart of the earth), He took bread and broke it saying, “This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And in the same way after supper, having given thanks, He said, “This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me. I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

If you want Him, come to the table. Do you see the Seed? Will you receive the Seed? If so, blessed are you . . . even when you’re lonely and plowed up, and you’ve lost everything. God is growing something truly great in you. Believe the Gospel. Amen.

Maybe you’ve got some dirt that you need to surrender. You’re tempted to hide the dirt, and the Lord is saying, “Come on, come on, give me the dirt. I want to turn you into the apostle to the Gentiles. I want to build my Church upon you. I want to make a man after my own heart.” He’s the Seed, and He turns your dirt into His Gospel of grace.

There’s one last thing I want to say. My dad is our Pastor Emeritus. We’ve thought he’s been on the edge of death several times, and then he pulls through, rallies, and keeps going. But it looks like he’s really close to the end. Last night our family said our good-byes and prayed together. He’s getting pneumonia, and this seems to be the time.

As he was lying there in bed, he said, “Peter, I have last words for those people in that congregation.” He said, “Peter, I want you to tell them that I think they are the greatest congregation that I’ve ever seen. And I love them all.”

You see, he just wanted you to know.

I said, “Well, dad, do you want me to tell them tomorrow or wait until you’re gone?” And he said, “Do it when it works best.” (You see, he’s a preacher . . . I grew up being an illustration for him, and he’s helping me now.) As I was driving to the church this morning, I realized it really works right now, because he’s a *seed* that contains *the* Seed. So if you have trouble with my sermon, think about my dad.

When you’re on the edge of death, you kind of become a hero and a saint, and everyone thinks you’re great. But I watched him for years. Believe me, he got chopped up and beat up, ground into the dirt. But he contains the Seed. And the Seed bears great fruit. *You’re* that fruit. And he just wants you to know you’re blessed.

The *Father* wants you to know you’re blessed. Receive the Word, and you’ll speak the Word.

In Jesus’ name, amen.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

For those who are following along in our series, you may have noticed that we skipped Matthew 12:46-50. We preached on these verses last May in a sermon entitled “Your Mother,” which may be ordered in tape or written form by calling the church, and would actually fall as #35 in this series.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. . . . And blessed is he who takes no offense at me. . . . But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. . . . Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.”

Matthew 5:3-11, 11:6, 13:16, 16:17b-18

One of Rachel’s favorite Bible studies that we did together was about the difference between the seed and the sod. I had helped her to understand that we were made from dirt and our bodies will return to dirt. However, that dirt is the planting ground for an eternal seed. Farmers don’t look for clean dirt when they plant seeds. They don’t vacuum all the dirt out of the garden so the seeds won’t get dirty. They need the dirt for the seed to grow. In fact, sometimes the dirt isn’t dirty enough, so they spread cow manure over the dirt to make it dirtier! They call this rich soil.

Beth Nimmo and Darrell Scott, Rachel’s Tears

Crying is a form of baptism . . . Crying is the way home . . . the ground is soft because I cry a lot.

Anne Lamott

A rabbi was asked a question by a pupil, referring to Deuteronomy 6:6—“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart.” “Why is it said this way?” the pupil asked. “Why are we not told to place them in our heart?” The rabbi answered that it is not within man’s power to place the divine teachings directly in his heart. “All that we can do is place them on the surface of the heart so that when the heart breaks they will drop in.”

Anonymous

And He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed.” Then I said, “Lord, how long?” And He answered: “Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, The houses are without a man, The land is utterly desolate, The LORD has removed men far away, And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. But yet a tenth will be in it, And will return and be for consuming, As a terebinth tree or as an oak, Whose stump remains when it is cut down. So the holy seed shall be its stump.”

Isaiah 6:9-13

Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to him who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says: ‘You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. Hear then the parable of the sower. When any one hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart; this is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is he who hears the word and immediately

receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is he who hears the word and understands it; he indeed bears fruit, and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Matthew 13:10-23

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. . . . “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

Isaiah 53:10-11, 55:10-11

Like the birds that nibble on the seeds and then pass them out of their bodies unimpaired, the devil has no power against the Word. Whatever warfare might have been necessary against him has already been undertaken and won. “My sheep hear my voice,” Jesus says, “and I give them eternal life. . . . they shall never perish, and no one shall pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28).

Robert Capon, Kingdom, Grace, Judgment

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Genesis 3:15

Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: “By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

Genesis 22:15-18

And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

John 12:23-24

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ. . . . And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:16, 29

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.” That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise: “At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.”

Romans 9:6-9

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord abides for ever.” That word is the good news which was preached to you.

1 Peter 1:22-25

You can offer your ideas to others as bullets or as seeds. You can shoot them, or sow them; hit people in the head with them, or plant them in their hearts. Ideas used as bullets will kill inspiration and neutralize motivation. Used as seeds, they take root, grow, and become reality in the life in which they are planted.

Alice Gray, Stories for the Heart

Birth pangs are felt in polished pulpits as once they were in a crude manger. Preaching the Word of God involves pain—for both preacher and hearers. What flows through one person's mouth into the heart of another, after all, is the Word of the wholly other God, and that's bound to create a disturbance along the way.

Donald W. McCullough, Trivialization of God