

July 9-10, 2011

Matthew...Sowing Seeds of Faith

Theme: *In Matthew's gospel we read how Jesus and his disciples sow seeds of faith by proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. This kingdom is "near" and "at hand". As a literate tax collector, Matthew could reflect on the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus because he witnessed all of this first hand. As followers of Jesus, we are called to sow seeds of faith.*

Text: Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

About Matthew and the Gospel

Although the first Gospel claims no authorship tradition from very early on ascribes it to Matthew. But who was Matthew? His Jewish name was Levi, son of Alphaeus. Matthew would have been his Greek name. Matthew was a Jew by birth. His conversion is recorded in Matthew 9:9ff. From that story we know that Matthew was a tax-collector for the occupying Roman government. He worked at the toll booth in Capernaum. So we can safely assume that he was a social outcast, a person of some means, would have been good with numbers, and probably pretty literate.

Because Matthew was a Jew, he had a deep passion for his own people. Because so many of the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah, Matthew wanted to give his people a further opportunity to consider the claims of Jesus in light of the Old Testament. If you thumb through Matthew, even briefly, you'll soon discover that Matthew, more than any other Gospel writer, quotes the Old Testament, usually trying to show that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah. In fact, Matthew quotes the OT 53 times, and alludes to it 76 other times.

One of Matthew's core themes is the Kingship of Jesus. Matthew is interested in showing his audience that Jesus is Lord, a person of divine power and authority over all things. How would this have been important to the Jews? They believed that the Messiah would be a king, like David. And Matthew tells us that the Good News that Jesus came to proclaim is that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. In other words, with Jesus' arrival the reign of God, which as always been in heaven, have broken into this world.

About Today's Text

The movement of Matthew's Gospel up to this point brings us to a critical question. How is it possible that God sent the long awaited Messiah into the world but only some people (and the least expected people at that) responded with faith? How is it possible that his own people "knew him not"? The primary purpose of the parable of the sower is to respond to that question. We may grant the important point that different people respond to the very same message differently, but then why is the devil successful with one person, unsuccessful with another? What are the root differences between those who sprout up and quickly fade and those who stay the course? Why is it that some are not overcome by worldly cares and others get lost in making money? The mystery of human response to the Gospel is described by Jesus but not resolved.

And while Jesus' parable is, I believe, meant to be more descriptive than prescriptive it does cause each of us to reflect on the kind of soil we are. Upon reflection most of us will recognize that we are made up of many different soils – perhaps depending on the day! How are the cares of this life and our obsession with “stuff” hindering our reception of the Good News and our spiritual growth? These are issues that the parable invites us to ponder.

Finally, while this parable seeks primarily to respond to Jesus as the Sower the Christian community in the centuries after Jesus' resurrection and ascension has also heard this parable as both a challenge and encouragement to be sowers of the Gospel. Each of us and all of us are invited to cast the Good News of God's redeeming and reconciling love, but this parable reminds us that we have very little control over the results of our sowing. Our job is simply to cast that seed liberally and leave the rest to God.

Preaching Possibilities

This is one of those weeks in which we're stretching the text a bit (OK, more than a bit!). Matthew is our featured character but Matthew isn't mentioned at all in this text. However, his story, especially recorded in Matthew 9, is of man into whom the seed of the Gospel was planted and it grew a hundredfold. Matthew is a living example of the parable that Jesus told, both in how he received the Word and how he cast it out (a part of his story that we will tell in the Planting Seeds Sermon Series in January/February 2012).

So, once again we'll tell the story of Matthew's life...as a “loser” transformed by Jesus' love. And then I'll challenge people to seek out the Matthew's in their world and cast seeds of God's love into their lives. I'll also use this as an opportunity to point people toward the sermon series in 2012.