

**Seeds of Faith**  
**by Gail Claus**  
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Today is Father's day. Let's have a hand for all of the fathers, grandfathers, people who have or had fathers in the congregation! If you read the Notes from Gail, you found what I thought was an interesting progression of events leading to Father's Day being a National Holiday. (And, you know I like greeting cards. Father's Day is the 5<sup>th</sup> highest selling holiday for Hallmark.)

Many of us have memories of the whole family pitching in to help make ends meet. A favorite of mine is as a little girl, my whole family packed big burlap bags with Ferry-Morse Seeds to ready them for shipment, and earn extra household money. We kids learned that seeds must be planted in order to grow, and you must work to have money.

I am very fortunate that my Father is still living. About a year ago he had a serious pulmonary embolism – the kind that only 30% survive. And my parents didn't even call 911! My Mother drove him to the hospital, 45 minutes away. There are four kids in my family, and I know my parents have never in their lives received lectures like they did from each of us!

I already know that I love my father deeply and enjoy his friendship, but this was such a wake-up call to how much I would miss him if I couldn't just pick up the phone and say "Hi, Dad."

My father developed a hobby about ten years ago when he was starting to think about what to do 'next' in retirement. He likes to tackle the most difficult things, so he began making violins even though he is not at all musically inclined. But after his embolism, he could no longer be around all of the sawdust or climb up and down the stairs to his shop.

I vaguely remember when I was a little girl, Dad painted watercolors. They were good enough that neighbors and relatives asked him to paint for them. So today Norm and I are giving him a hint – you might call it suggestion -- as to what he could do next. We got him all of the supplies he needs to begin painting again. He either will or he won't, but we planted the seed.

In our reading this morning we heard two stories about seeds. In the first, the story about the sower, we were told that seeds were strewn across the ground. Somehow

this reminds when a meadow in a can was a fad. Do you remember that? You could buy a can of mixed seeds and distribute them over dirt. Presto! An instant garden! Getting back to our Biblical story, a man sowed seeds by strewing them across the land. Some of the seeds landed on rock, some on shallow dirt and some on good soil. Where there was shallow dirt, the plants grew shoots, then withered and died when the soil could not support the shoots, and the sun scorched them. Clearly, the seeds that survived were those that landed in deep, good soil where they could establish a solid root system that could withstand the elements.

There is much richness in this story. Let's take a minute to place this parable in the context of ancient Palestine. Jesus is teaching a crowd gathered by the Sea of Galilee. This is an area of Palestinian farmers. From the parable, I imagine a rugged, harsh, craggy landscape. The heat is scorching!

The farmers sowed the seed by hand, until lightly plowing it into the dirt. The field was divided into strips; the sower scattered the seed from a pouch with a wide swing of the arm to cover the width of the strip. A plowman followed behind, trying to plow as many seeds into the ground as possible. Even with the hard work, the birds ate some of the seed.

The farmer plowing for the first time in the parts of Palestine that were near or in the hills did not know where the craggy spots were, until the land was plowed. In these rocky areas covered with a thin layer of dirt some seed fell. The soil was warmer and the soil quickly saturated when it rained. The seeds rapidly sprouted, only to die from the scorching heat.

This parable is a metaphor for saying that there are many ways to listen to God's word. One way to interpret this story is to contrast birds eating the seed that fall on the wayside to a person who hears the word of God but does not understand it. We are not supposed to judge another person's faith, but I for one cannot help but to see the analogy.

What about the seeds that fall on rocky ground in a little dirt? Perhaps the Palestinians as well as us understood that this describes those who joyously hear God's words, are thrilled for a time, but then forget what they have heard.

And what we strive to be like is the seed that is rooted in the earth with wide-spreading roots, and grows a healthy plant. That analogy is to our strong, steadfast faith. In this parable we are promised that the deeds of those who act in faithfulness will gradually grow and flourish into the people they were meant to be. There is no

instant gratification; gratification comes from our carrying out tasks as best we can, and leaving the rest to God.

In our second story, The Parable of the Mustard Seed, perhaps the most familiar of Jesus' parables, the smallest seed that was known at that time was the mustard seed. Look at the altar and see the jar with mustard seeds.

These tiny seeds can grow into mighty shrubs, typically about 5 feet tall, which provide shade and a place for birds to make their nests. One can see this parable as the shrub being the kingdom of God and the birds representing the Gentiles. Here Jesus is telling us that by living faithfully and sometimes sacrificially, we will gain our way into the Kingdom of God. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus makes reference to the smallness of the mustard seed. He says, paraphrased, 'If you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could move a mountain.' God's Kingdom starts small and grows large.

Pope John XX11 is quoted as saying "I do my best and leave the rest to God." I see this as the plight of the farmer. And to us, today, if we act to the best of our ability, we should have patience to allow the results to flourish and calmness if they do not.

While we cannot guarantee results, God provides us a rich harvest, so staying with His word will bear the fruit we need. Our own witnesses may seem weak and to influence few, but God is a power that can make us stronger in action and word.

I believe these parables are both about new beginnings. In each story we have seeds that provide growth. Christianity had small beginnings, yet it has grown to a very large worldwide community of believers. Sometimes we feel small in our faith. At those times, remember that God is your God and the same God of people all over the world. You can join a community of believers like we have in worship today to do great things.

I would guess that we all have new beginnings in our lives. I have new beginnings in my life periodically. One such time of a new beginning was just this week when reading, praying and contemplating these parables. The stories suddenly hit me in such a personal manner that I felt as if I were in the crowd by the Sea of Galilee. I could smell the water, feel the swarms of people, and most of all feel the scorching heat while listening to Jesus teach.

I also found something else in these parables: a new spiritual dimension. I saw three elements common to both parables: seeds, roots and branches. And my faith

stepped in to liken the three elements to prayer, contemplation, and spreading the Word.

Marcus Borg, in *The Heart of Christianity*, explores the meaning of being a disciple of Christ. He explains that while we know the commandment to love the Lord your God with all our hearts and minds, many of us wonder 'What does it mean to love God?' Marcus Borg has a simple answer – practice. He goes on to tell us it means loving God and what God loves.

He further states there is no distinction between the words discipline and disciple. Making a conscious decision to follow Christ means living a disciplined life in the Spirit. It means being a committed disciple.

God plants seeds in our life that we may or may not notice. Our challenge is to prepare the soil of our lives to receive and nurture these seeds such that they take root and bring us closer to God. When we are closer to God, our spiritual lives bear more love, hope, joy and kindness. And our spiritual life then transcends into our outward life. We radiate what we feel. If we send out love, we will get love in return. And what can be more powerful to others than if they see that your knowing God brings about love and kindness.

I encourage you to contemplate what your own seeds of faith are, and look for your faith to be grounded in deep, good soil. The seed is the word of God.

Amen