

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus talks about sowing the seeds over the soil rather than carefully planting them. This method of planting is called broadcasting and that was the current practice of farming in Jesus' day. There was little knowledge of modern methods of farming – soil conservation, crop rotation and careful sowing.

I have wonder if Jesus was telling the story today would he change this parable to reflect current agricultural and gardening methods. Would he talk about the need to make sure the seed was planted in the right place for optimum growth, to not waste seeds?

I don't think so, because this parable is really about Grace - God's grace.

You see, if we could all cultivate the soil of our lives carefully, making sure that each part of our life is rich, fertile, and always receptive to the work of God, then, each seed sowed in our life would grow into a magnificent plant. Only then could this parable be changed to reflect our more careful gardening practices.

No matter how hard we try, there are going to be hard rocky places, and shallow thorny places in our lives.

There is a saying "Life shows no prejudices when it hands out its fortunes and misfortunes".

I do not know why I was born in a peaceful small town in Southwestern Minnesota rather than a hot poverty-stricken village in Africa.

I don't know why some of us are given good loving parents and some of us must deal with great adversity and strife.

I don't know why people who have been wise in their choices, endeavoring to do what is good, beautiful and right, still find themselves facing hardship and trouble which threatens to undo them.

And I don't know why some of us must struggle with great boulders of hurt and distrust. Boulders which take years to remove because it takes years to know how best to forgive, heal and trust again.

All of us have places in our lives where thorns of adversity and temptation threaten to choke out all the good. We worry too much; we have habits we have picked up along the way which tempt us away from holy living.

All of us have all sorts of soils in our lives, some fertile, some stony and some full of thorns, no matter how hard we try to be a beautiful garden. And we should try, there is no doubt about that.

Those habits need to change, we need to learn to give all our cares to God, to learn to trust God in all that we do. A beautiful garden with rich soil is the goal of holy living, and our gardener, God, is ready to help us become such a garden.

For notice, in all the soils except the hard garden path, the word of God takes root and grows even if it is for a moment.

In the great boulder fields of your life, the thorn-choked corners which you want to hide from view and the shallow sandy places, God's word comes and begins to grow.

Sure, evil does all it can to snatch the Word out of your life. The evil one loves gardens which are overgrown with worry, bad habits and frightful circumstances. But the seed has sprouted even for a moment and in that moment your soil has been changed forever. We know even the smallest thing can have a huge impact.

In the summer of 1996 just before twilight, a rock, 300-400 feet wide broke loose from a ledge on Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park. As the rock descended 'a thick swirl of dust rose from the valley floor like an explosive cloud and after it settled an hour later, park rangers found a quarter-mile long piece of forest flattened. Over 500 trees toppled.

Of course erosion, wind and rain played a large part in this rock slide, but so did rock lichen and small plants that grew in the cracks and crevices of that great rock.

If you have ever been on a mountain, you have seen those surprising plants, hidden in the seams of granite rock. Did you ever stop to think about what those small plants, with their shallow roots, so susceptible to the sun's heat and winter's cold are doing to that rock? Slowly through the centuries those small plants grow and change the entire makeup of that huge rock, and someday that rock will be turned to dust.

This is how the word of God works in our lives. A kind word from a friend, a sermon, a song on the radio, a bible verse on a picture, the faint memory of your grandmother's prayers or a simple question from a child.

Even when God's word is there for only a moment, your life is changed. The boulders shift a little, the thorns and thistles move back some. In that place in your life, the soil is made richer and deeper.

The UMW organization is one vehicle where lives are changed: first through study, then through action. Issues are studied, scriptures are studied, then action is taken at the local, state, national and international levels. Often these actions are seen as minuscule steps, like changing to compostable cups and plates in the church kitchen or giving small amounts of money to a mission in Kinshasa, but when combined with actions of thousands of likeminded UMW members around the world, big impacts can be made.

You see, the greatest danger for us is in becoming the hard garden path-that place which cannot be receptive to the messages of God. That is what we must and can guard against.

For, while we cannot control much of our lives, we can make sure our hearts and souls, our gardens, are willing to accept the word of God wherever and however it is scattered.

For we can be sure that this Gardener, our great and loving God will continue to broadcast seeds across our lives. We need to continually work at improving our soil so the seeds can flourish.

And the promise is this: Eventually, through the patience and grace of our loving God, a harvest will be made, a rich and abundant harvest. Some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold and some a hundred-fold.

Amen