

Last week I spent Sunday afternoon at a favorite location from my childhood- Huntington Beach, California. It was pretty crowded thanks to the fourth of July holiday weekend, and so I can see in my mind's eye what Jesus needed to do when he sought refuge from the crowds on a little boat. I can imagine this wise teacher sitting in a boat, the crowds on that cresting sandy beach in a makeshift amphitheater. Jesus teaches people from the boat, and he starts with this parable about a man going out to sow seeds. The peasant farmer in the story spreads his seeds out on his field by hand, reaching into the pouch on his hip and flinging out the seeds. While any farmer worth his salt will get most of the seed onto the good soil of the field, inevitably some seed lands on the path, where birds snatch it up. Some lands in rocky soil, where the roots can't grow deep enough. Those plants wither in the scorching summer sun. And some seeds land in a place where thorny weeds will grow and choke them. But most of the seed lands in good soil.

Another childhood memory is hearing this very parable and wondering: am I the seed in the rocky soil? Are you the seed in the thorny growth? I associated this parable with condemnation, with judgment. That's not what this parable is about. It is not about who is in and who is out. It is about preparing the earth for heaven- about bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth. That's why God became human- that's what Jesus came to announce- the in breaking of the kingdom of heaven. Matthew chapter 13 is full of these kingdom of heaven parables- there are seven such stories. Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a woman adding leaven into her bread mixture. The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of a pearl of great price, a treasure buried in a field, a mustard seed, a net that is cast out into the sea and catches all kinds of fish. Jesus is teaching us how to see the seeds of the kingdom of heaven all around us- in everyday stories for everyday people. Peasants, women in their kitchens, fishermen. Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven has broken into our everyday lives. Most of us think about going to heaven after we die, but Jesus was telling us that heaven is coming here- to the earth. The seeds have already been planted.

The seeds of the kingdom of heaven are justice and peace. Those are the seeds we need to nurture to bring about the transformation of earth into the kingdom of heaven. Can we look around us and see the seeds of justice, the seeds of peace, growing around us? Last night, after a long day at the joust and with the kids, I couldn't think of any examples of these seeds of justice and peace. I was tired, it was late, and I couldn't figure out where the good news was for us. I told my husband Dave that I was going to bed, and that I'd read the paper in the morning to see what seeds of justice and peace I could find in the world. So I got up this morning and lo and behold- here in the Capital, right on the front page is an article about a certain church in Annapolis who had a joust yesterday! If you read on and turn to page A7, you'll find this paragraph: "One of the church's younger members, a little girl adopted from Asia, organized a 'penny arcade' to raise funds for half the Sky, a Chinese children's relief fund founded in 1998. She set up five games, including a penny pitch and a guessing contest. In all, \$260 was collected for the charity." Right here in our parish grows the seeds of justice and peace, as one of our younger members raises money to help children affected by that devastating earthquake in China. Remember that earthquake? This money will help get those kids back on their feet, thanks to seeds planted deep in good soil.

What makes good soil? According to my reading, good soil requires two things: fertility and texture. Fertility means that soil has the right nutrients and pH. Those nutrients do different things for the plant- nitrogen helps the leaves and stem to grow, phosphorus helps the roots to grow, and potassium boosts the plant's immune system. The pH must be in a certain range for the nutrients to be accessed. The best texture for soil is somewhere between sand and clay – light enough for air and water to move through it. Good soil is a complex thing – made up of many diverse things to foster plant growth.

This week I encourage you to get down on your hands and knees- if you can!- and touch and test the soil around you. Is the soil filled with the complex nutrients to nourish the seeds of justice and peace? Is the earth prepared for heaven to grow? It is our work as baptized Christians to prepare the earth for heaven, and to teach one another how to plant the seeds of justice and peace around us. We toss them out of our seed pouch trusting that most of them make it onto the good soil, growing into the kingdom of heaven right around us.