

# ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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## SOIL TEST

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Text of a Sermon preached on the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

July 12, 2020

ISAIAH 55:10-13 | PSALM 65: 9-14

ROMANS 8:1-11 | MATTHEW 13:1-9,18-23

Listen! My grandfather was a man always on the move. As my father tells it, he was never home. His idea of a good time was to go someplace remote and make a map of it. He helped set up the first radar for the US and Canadian governments in the Yukon. He was part of the international team that mapped the border between Argentina and Chile. In his prime he settled into a job running a silver mine in the mountains of Colorado, so high, so cold, so covered in snow that my father went to school 250 miles away six months out of the year.

Even when he became a professor of mining, he liked the idea of living in Kansas and working in Missouri. He couldn't stay still in retirement. He moved to Arizona. He literally died in his front lawn swinging a hammer half way through installing a new fence.

Listen! "A sower went out to sow." That's all you need to know. This is Jesus' opening line to teach the rest of us about God. Listen! Jesus says. I have taken in every word of the Scriptures and this is what I see. Our God is always saying something, always on the move, always speaking, always creating, mandating, legislating, guiding, judging, comforting - and yes - creating all over again. Here, let me get in this boat and go out a little from shore so that all of you can hear me.

Come to think of it, it was my mother who was the gardener. And she did not have much to work with. Hard, dry, high, shallow Wyoming dirt. Whether by sweat or imagination she was always out sowing and tilling, living out an abundant faith in nature's creative and recreative powers.

Listen! Do you hear the joy in all of it? There is delight in every word, every project, every new handful of seed.

God is having at least as much fun as my grandfather and mother did. "A sower went out to sow." So much seed, in every imaginable place. Don't miss any of it. What does it take to understand? God is talking to us - sometimes shouting - all the time!

Things could be completely crazy. You could be thousands of miles away, like the people of Israel, living in exile from your home, or like a global and connected world trapped inside our homes for months because of an unprecedented pandemic – and the Lord will say to you:

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

Rain and snow and seed time and harvest. The Bible is such a noisy book. Listen! You don't want to miss it:

“For you shall go out in joy,  
and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall burst into song,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

Israel, your exile is over. You may return home. Not only are you going places. So is all of God's creation. Every generation will need a word from the Lord. Lord, we need a word.

There is now a world full of virus. It is teaching us so many things. The other day I heard someone say that the virus was God's judgment on us. But about what precisely? About how we are destroying the habitat of certain animals, not living in balance with them? That we fail to cooperate with one another so that everyone, especially the poor, the weak and the elderly can be taken care of, not suffer more than all the rest of us?

There is meaning in all of it. Even now we see the profound wisdom in Jesus' most famous teaching. A sower went out to sow. Seed fell everywhere. God is speaking to you and me. Let's not miss it. Let us consider how we need to change so that we can receive the message, and walk in his purposes and plan for us.

The parable of the sower is about the seed, but it is also about the soil. Without good soil, worked with compost, seeds cannot flourish. God can't use tired packed soil, unforgiving rocky soil, soil choked with thorns and weeds.

- What does it mean to be good soil, prepared to receive the word of the kingdom?
- How do we assess what kind of shape our soil is in?
- What would we need to do for the seed to be able to take root in our bodies and souls?
- How will we know if this is happening?
- And how might we nurture good soil in those around us?

The kingdom of heaven, says Matthew, belongs to the poor in spirit and the persecuted (Matthew 5:3,10), it is governed by humility (18:3; 19:140) and demonstrated in righteousness (5:10, 19-20; 6:33), which is to do the will of God (7:21). In order to test the soil in us and around us, at the very least, we must be open to what God is asking of us.

Consider Mary, the mother of God. The Theotokos. The God bearer.

When the Ángel Gabriel appeared to her, she had her own set of questions. But in the end, all she needed to know that “nothing is impossible with God.” She was not new to prayer and the presence. She was ready. And after she conceived of the Holy Spirit and bore him into the world, she remained ready, attentive, present throughout her life, to what the Word was accomplishing, especially at her son’s death. She was always faithful, bearing and holding the word, pointing others to what God was saying and doing, praying for God’s purposes to be accomplished.

Lately, I have been praying the Angelus three times a day as the church teaches. It is a great comfort to join in the prayer of all the saints, but especially, the prayers of God’s mother, who calls us back to prayer at the time when the seed is being cast, the seed is falling, the seed is taking root in us.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners NOW....

Listen! The sower is sowing. God is speaking. To receive his word, let us do what we know will make us more welcoming to the message. Above all, let us pray!