

The Ecosystems of Our Hearts

“A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path...some seed fell among thorns, and...some seeds fell on rich soil.” (See Matthew 13: 1-9)

Oftentimes when we reflect on the parable of the sower, we say “Well I hope I am the good soil. And if I’m not, then how could I become the good soil?” And perhaps a little later we might look to the people on our right and on our left and ask ourselves, “I wonder, who is the bad soil? Which person is the thorny soil? And who is the rocky road?” However, I think that is the wrong way to reflect on this passage. I believe it is a poor interpretation of what Jesus exhorting us to do. Perhaps, instead, the Lord is trying to tell us that each of our hearts is the entire ecosystem that He is speaking of here. In our hearts we have rocky ground; in our hearts we have a thorn bush and a briar patch. And in our hearts we have good soil. People aren’t divided into one soil or another; each of us are all of them.

To put it another way, among all of the projects and enterprises of our lives, some of them are planted in good soil in our hearts and abundant fruit is springing forth. But others of them are not bearing such good fruit. Perhaps through this passage, the Lord is exhorting us to look at the field of our heart and at the endeavors of our lives and ask ourselves where in our life is there good soil? What part of my heart receives the Word and brings forth good fruit? And what part of my heart bears no fruit and seems unable to absorb the Word?

And what do we do then once we find the rocky soil—those endeavors of our lives that do not produce good fruit? What do we do with the briar patches of our heart? Well, the Lord has another parable that might help. It’s about a tree that did not produce good fruit:

“There once was a person who planted a fig tree in his orchard and when he came in search of fruit on it he found nothing, so he said to the gardener ‘for three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none, so cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?’ The gardener said in reply, ‘Sir, leave it for this year also and I shall cultivate the ground around it, fertilize it and it may bear fruit in the future; if not, we can cut it down.’” (see Luke 13: 6-9)

Once we have identified the barren trees and rocky soils of our lives, perhaps we can do as the second parable advises. Perhaps we can give it a bit more time—maybe cultivate it and nurture it; water the soil and prune the branches. Work on it a while and see if in this area of our life we can indeed bear fruit. But if, after our best efforts, we still can’t bear fruit, then let’s listen to the landowner in that parable ‘*Why should it exhaust the soil?*’ Perhaps it is time to let it go so that the trees that are bearing good fruit can receive the precious nutrients of our care and attention. Truth be told, you and I have neither the time nor the psychic energy to tend to all the trees of our life. Every now and then we have to cull the forest. We have to discern to let a few trees go. So, let’s find the rocky soil in our life, let’s give it another try and then let’s let the barren trees go and move on to the fruit-bearing soils of our life.

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