

**Lakewood Congregational Church
Breathing in Soil**

July 12, 2020



Matthew 13:1-23

13That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!'

Verses 1-9: Remember that last week, Jesus was frustrated because people were slow to understand and slow to follow John and him (chapter 11). Now, the situation is even more tense.

○ How do you respond when you are stressed, when your plans are not meeting your expectations?

Jesus responded by refocusing. He knew his mission and he knew what God expected of him. Jesus switched gears and began to teach using parables. Let anyone with ears listen!

For today's parable, Jesus is on the Sea of Galilee's northern shore when the crowds became so large that he speaks to them from a boat about a sower and four kinds of soil. I wondered how anyone, other than the disciples, could have heard Jesus. This video demonstrates the natural amphitheater in the cove where Jesus spoke: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qR9jeFDuXOE>

○ Name the four kinds of soil.

10 Then the disciples came and asked him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' ¹¹He answered, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹²For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ¹³The reason I speak to them in parables is that "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand." ¹⁴With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: "You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. ¹⁵ For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them." ¹⁶But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

- **Verses 10-17:** These verses are not a part of today's lectionary readings, nor are they included in subsequent weeks. We will explore different parables for the next few weeks, so I kept these verses. Let's learn about parables.

When you ask people to name their favorite Bible story, often they mention a parable. Parables are stories that are easy to remember, but which hold important truths about God. If we do not understand them at the first telling, then we may carry the story with us and, perhaps, understand it later. Parables also evolve in meaning as we mature on our faith journey and, yet parables remain intergenerationally accessible. Jesus, by referencing everyday objects or life, gives us simple and timeless ways to explain how God interacts with humans and how humans may interact with God.

- How does Jesus respond to the disciples when they ask about parables?
- Why did Jesus quote Isaiah?

18 'Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.'

○ **Verses 18-23:** This is what I believe through faith and life experience. During our life, we experience the four soils, sometimes wandering among them. There are times in our faith journey when we are one with God and we know that we are walking with Jesus. We can feel it, inside and out, and we know that we are blessed and being a blessing. We are in good soil and our roots aerate the ground.

Other times, we are in the weeds. We choose other priorities and we start choking as those priorities claim more of our time, energy, and resources. Maybe we experience overgrown consumerism, have misplaced loyalties, struggle to say “no” to commitments, or have an addiction.

At other moments, we do not know whether the rocks are on top of us, beside us or under us. Sometimes, we do not know how the rocks formed, but what seemed good and joyous is not and our roots are unable to support us in this environment. Perhaps, we are not accepted at our favorite college or there is an unexpected diagnosis, a job loss, heartbreaking relationships, or financial struggles.

And, we may also experience a soil so packed that it will not absorb a gentle rain. This happens during depression, when isolated, or when our fears snatch the good news from our heart.

- In which soil are you living?

Friends, read the verses again. The sower went out to sow and sowed seeds on every type of soil. When God is the sower, then you may expect extravagance, abundance, and seed sown, even in places others would consider a lost cause. I do not believe that God is being wasteful. God knows that God is not alone in tending the soil. God created us.

When you are thriving in good soil, then the faith community will celebrate with you and will help keep your journey watered and fed. If you are among the thorns, then the faith community can help you pull weeds, listen to you, and help you discern a healthier journey. If you are among the rocks, then the faith community can sit with you and help you navigate the rocks as your move toward good soil. And in the hard, seemingly unforgiving soil, the faith community hoes humus into your life with Psalms and Jesus provides grace upon grace and abounding hope. And in all types of soil, the community supports with love and with prayer.

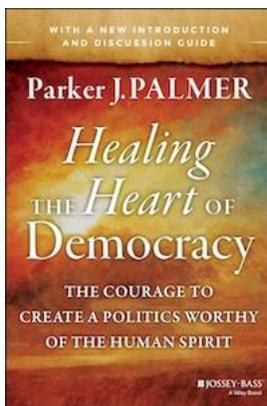
When we support each other and understand the parables, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, then we will live into God’s abundance, which is the soil that yields the best fruit.

*¹⁰ For 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,
¹¹ 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.*

¹² *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.*

¹³ *Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.* Isaiah 55:10-13



Today is our third week exploring Parker J. Palmer's book, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*. If you missed the previous weeks, you may find the information on LCC's website under the blog tab, in the weekly reflections. Please consider purchasing this book or borrowing it from the library. This week, we are learning about the Second Habit of the Heart: An Appreciation of Otherness.

First Habit of the Heart: We're All in this Together
Second Habit of the Heart: An Appreciation of Otherness

Videos

Sharing our Stories (3:00 min)

<http://www.couragerenewal.org/democracyguide/v6/>

- Share an example of when you have found common ground with a person holding different convictions on a political or moral issue.
- How do you think telling your own story can help you build a bridge to someone else?
- Might listening to others and sharing our stories help reduce the epidemic of loneliness in our country? How can reducing loneliness help our democracy and create healthier soil for everyone? (The loneliest generations are Gen Z, 1997-2012, and Millennials, 1981-1996). References at the end.

The Second Habit of the Heart: An Appreciation of Otherness (1:50)

<http://www.couragerenewal.org/democracyguide/v14/>

- Describe the people who are "us" to you.
- Describe the people who are "them" to you.
- Share a story about crossing lines of difference in a way that made your world a larger and more inviting place?

An Appreciative Eye for Humanity: Betty's Diner (8:40 min), Parker Palmer and Carrie Newcomer <http://www.couragerenewal.org/democracyguide/v28/>

- Have you ever felt a change for the better as you learned more about the life story of someone you barely knew, or even a total stranger?
- How can we give people more opportunities to tell their stories in our congregation and in our communities?
- Share and celebrate the times when you have experienced “the spirit of goodness” moving within a company of strangers?

♥ *Benediction* comes from two Latin roots, *bene* (well) and *dict* (speak). A benediction is a blessing that concludes worship services. You may also say a benediction to close your day. Since it is a blessing, a benediction is affirming, while also encouraging future behavior. And, that behavior is accomplished with God’s help or Jesus’ saving grace or the Spirit’s creative energy.

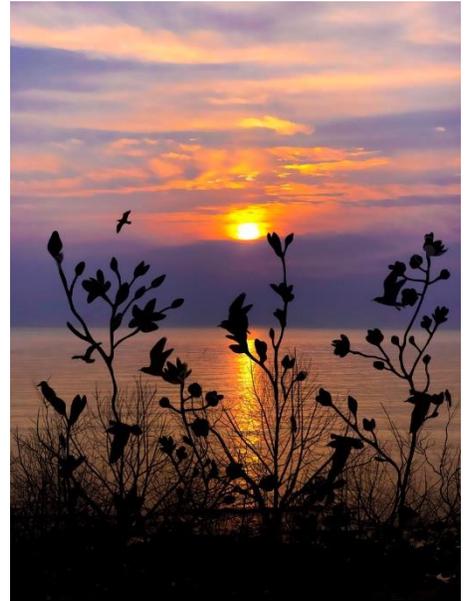
This week, write a benediction based on Jesus’ words in Matthew, ideas from the Palmer text or based on the hymn, *Be Thou my Vision*.

Three examples that I wrote:

Go forth and seek fertile ground. Sow seeds extravagantly for yourself and for this world, knowing that Spirit-led efforts sprout. Live in joy and return in peace. Amen.

Strive to love your neighbor and to love yourself. Share stories and listen deeply to others. Find common ground. Proactively create healthy soil for all people. Participate in the beloved community in thought, word, and deed. Amen.

Rest well, dear one, knowing that the heart of your own heart dwells within you. Awake refreshed and joyful, ready to embrace God’s vision and wisdom for your life. Amen.



Music: Be Thou My Vision

Sam Robson: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8t-sQ8savg>

*Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that thou art
thou my best thought by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.*

*Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
Thou my redeemer, my love thou hast won,
Thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.*

*Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise,
thou mine inheritance, now and always;
thou and thou only, first in my heart,
Great God of heaven, my treasure thou art.*

*Great God of heaven, my victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.*

- How does the Lord provide or influence your vision of yourself, your family, community, and LCC?
- How are you and God one?
- Does God provide your vision during times of healthy soil and in times of packed dry ground? Why or why not?

References and Images

Healthy Soil: <https://www.growingmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/plant-748x421.jpg>

Parker J. Palmer: www.couragerenewal.org

Loneliness 2020: (1) <https://www.cigna.com/static/www-cigna-com/docs/about-us/newsroom/studies-and-reports/combating-loneliness/cigna-2020-loneliness-factsheet.pdf>. (2) <https://socialpronow.com/loneliness-statistics/#15>

Benediction, evening silhouette:

https://live.staticflickr.com/4871/31017234777_6467c88804_b.jpg

Northern Lights:

https://www.arcticfocus.org/media/images/AdobeStock_178359962.2e16d0ba.fill-1370x700-c100.jpg

Be Thou My Vision, Chalice hymnal 595

Words: 8th century Irish song; translated Mary E. Byrne, 1905; verses by Eleanor H. Hull, 1912, alt. Music: Traditional Irish melody; harmony Carlton R. Young, 1963.