

It seems to me that spring came rather late this year. It's officially here toward the end of March, but it didn't really start getting to be spring until about a month later. That's when the brave little daffodils and pear trees were finally joined by all the other blossoms. That's when it became the beautiful season spring that we are now enjoying, even if sometimes chilly in temperature. We could use a bit more sunshine and warmth, don't you think? But, that's Management, and I am only in Sales.

Once I knew a lady who experienced spring for the first time after she was an adult. She had been born in Hawaii, a beautiful place where flowers bloom constantly, and the weather is always balmy. Sometimes it rains, but it is warm. She had never seen spring. Then, as a young adult, she had moved to Northern California. Winter in Northern California is just dreary and rainy and cool—nothing to our cold, snowy, icy winters, but to someone born and raised in Hawaii, it would probably be a shock. Then, springtime came—sunshine, blossoms, flowers, warmer weather. She said it seemed like a miracle! It was! It is!

Spring is also planting time, or as the Bible often puts it, seed-time. One of Jesus' most loved stories is about the sowing of seeds.

It's a parable, a story to make us think, and arrive at the truth behind it for ourselves. To quote Mr. William Barclay:

“Truth has always a double impact when it is a personal discovery.”

However, this particular parable was one which Jesus explained to his 12 disciples and the rest of the group traveling with them all. The sower is someone (Jesus or a later Christian follower) who is trying to teach and preach and share the Christian faith.

This person (this sower) is trying to plant the seeds (God's Word) as much as possible, in as wide an area as possible. Because of this, the sower doesn't take two seeds to poke down into a hole. No, the sower takes a whole bag of seeds to fling out, far and wide, hoping that some of it will grow.

We do that with grass seed ourselves. We're not planting seed by seed for houseplants, or a row of vegetables, we're planting for a whole yard. I remember my mother had a device with a handle to twist which seemed to grind out the seeds, far and wide.

Now, the sower in the story has mixed results, because the seed falls on different kinds of soil.

Soil #1 is the roadside—the birds just come along and eat it. It doesn't grow a bit. The understanding here is that the Word of God never sinks in at all for such people. It is immediately snatched away by evil. That may be an especially good way to think about the people doing their best to explain away all of God's miracles and wonders and works. Like saying—“Hey, spring comes every year, big deal” or “That was just a coincidence that you stopped on the sidewalk to tie your shoes just when that car ran the red light and would have hit you.” Evil is around and is at work in “snatching away” the word of God, and even the notion of God.

Then we have soil #2, rocky ground. Seeds will grow, but there is no root, no depth to give strength in times of heat. The sun scorches the plants and they die.

That's when the word of God is received and accepted, but doesn't sink all the way in, and there's no depth and strength to help us when being a Christian gets tough, which it does from time to time. Maybe that's where we get the idea of "can't take the heat."

Soil #3 is the thistly/thorny/weed-filled ground, with so many thorns and thistles and weeds there already, that the newly grown plants get choked out, for lack of space.

That's when we let our worries and desires get in the way of our faith. Our minds and schedules get so crowded that worship of God and prayers and Christian values get crowded out of our lives.

But finally, we have soil #4, the good stuff, the right stuff. The seeds grow well, they put down roots, they yield a great harvest. These people hear the word of God, receive it well, and bring forth fruit.

That's what we are aiming to be, Christians who hear God's word well, let it sink into our souls, and become truly fruitful.

Of course, fruitful is another one of those botanical words which we don't need to take literally.

What we are talking about is growth and maturing in our faith, and spirits, and souls.

Growth is often silent and invisible and not noticeable for a while. But it does come, and then it is wonderful.

With plants and trees we are talking real vegetables and grains and fruits. There are baskets and baskets, bushels and bushels of them!

When we are talking about Christians who grow and mature in faith, we can see that growth by what St. Paul called the fruits of the Spirit, in the book of Galatians.

Since I read that Scripture from a super-modern Bible translation, The Message, I'll re-read it from the New Revised Standard Version, which is more specific in the list of fruits:

(Verse 22) By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

These are the things the Holy Spirit will produce in us, as Christians, as we grow in our faith. These are what will be seen in the characters and lives of faithful Christians.

They sound, wonderful, don't they? People like that are great to be around; they are inspiring.

Of course, all of us here are at different stages in our lives and our faith. There are new-to-the-faith folks, seeds just dropped on the ground.

There are Christians in the advanced stages, with all nine qualities showing in their lives.

There are those of us in between, with the Holy Spirit working so hard to produce fruit in our lives. My difficult-to-grow fruit is patience, I just can't wait!

Now, we know that parables are stories, and the comparisons eventually break down; we are people, not dirt with seeds. We have the freedom to act and believe and live. We can choose to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and develop into better Christians, or we can choose to resist and rebel and stagnate.

Yet, why would we want to resist the wonderful things God has in store for us? Wouldn't we rather grow more like Christ over our lifetimes?

Of course we would! And maybe we can be the best "garden" our Lord ever had!

Amen.

(By Rev. Sally J. DeMasters)