

The seed, the sower and the Source: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

When a seed is snapped up by a bird of the air, the seed's journey isn't necessarily over.

by [Bradley E. Schmeling](#) in the [July 1, 2008](#) issue

I have been preparing to walk across northern Spain on the Camino de Santiago, a journey that pilgrims have made for a thousand years. In order to break in my hiking boots, I've been walking through Atlanta. I expected to notice neighborhoods and neighbors in new ways, and to find little places of sacred rest. I was able to do that when I was on well-paved sidewalks, but most of the time I was walking on sidewalks that were cracked and broken, or they were nonexistent. I was busy trying not to twist an ankle, trip over a root or step into a hole. Instead of a grand view, I got a close-up of the ground right under my feet.

It wasn't entirely clear which soil was good soil, which was rocky ground and which was thorny overgrowth. Beautiful flowers pushed their way through cracks in cement, for example, their beauty an example of God's handiwork in a city of concrete. At another point on my hike, my meditation was interrupted by the squawking of birds flocking in mulberry bushes and gorging on ripe, red fruit. I learned in a very direct way that when a seed is snapped up by a bird of the air, the seed's journey isn't necessarily over. Wiping off my shoulder, I continued my journey.

With Jesus' parable of the seed and the field in my mind, I became caught up in the mystery of life around me. The city terrains were mixed together in marvelous interrelated patches of fertile and questionable soil, with plants that grew according to their own beauty in both places, plants that horticulturalists would call weeds. Growth was happening in every corner of my journey.

It struck me that my inner terrain was more like the patchwork terrain of my hike than the neatly differentiated terrain in the parable of the sower and the seed. My life is filled with patterns that are so well trodden, overlapping and sunbaked that it's virtually impossible for the seed of the word to take root. I'm often afraid to let new

growth occur on those well-traveled tracks, lest I be forced to build a whole new path. I've got weeds of fear and doubt that choke out the most hopeful messages planted by the most determined sower. And it would be embarrassing to list all the different faith practices that I've been excited about and then abandoned—the latest prayer beads, icons or meditative texts.

Yet my struggling faith, as full of weeds as it is, has been the place where I have been able to connect with others. The cracks in the facade, the moments when people have seen past my smooth attempts to pull off a good harvest, have been exactly the moments when seeds of the genuine harvest began to sprout. God has turned my weaknesses to strength in the fields of God's harvest, and I've seen signs of the full harvest of heaven already, even before results of that harvest are carried into the barn. For me, this parable pulls back the curtain and allows us to see the mystery of Christ present and planted in all things.

By now I recognize all the different soils inside my spirit. I have heard and studied the word, but I fail to understand it. I've been filled with great joy at the power of the word proclaimed, only to have forgotten it when life called for me to stand in solidarity with those who suffer. I carry Christ planted deep within my consciousness but then wander off into the luxurious temptations of American life. But this common, imperfect life becomes holy ground when God is present. When I remember that the Christ of the harvest is at work within the fields of my own spirit, I see the whole world as a place alive with the reign of God, and the church as a field alive and growing with the presence of Jesus, all of us both good soil and solid rock.

When I learned this parable as a child, I looked around me to see who had a shallow faith, who was swept up in cultural temptations, or who was simply too hard to be ground for God's grace. I determined to keep on the straight and narrow so that I would be gathered in with the harvest. But I've come to recognize that this parable is not about our power, but about the power of God to grow a harvest. There's no explaining why seed grows in this place and not that place, on this ground or that path. The miracle is God's power to bring out of the harvest fruit that will yield mercy and justice, compassion and forgiveness. Thanks be to God that the sower sows and will sow until the whole world blooms a hundredfold.