

What makes good soil? (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23)

If it were easy, we would have it all figured out already.

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Jesus calls this the parable of the sower. But the focus of his explanation seems to be not on the sower but on the seeds and where they fall. What circumstances and situations allow for these seeds to grow and bear fruit? The answer: good soil.

Jesus does not go into much detail as to what makes for “good soil,” either. How do we ensure that the troubles of this world and our own problems do not stifle growth? How can we allow God’s word to take root in our lives so that transformation and change are possible, both personally and in community? These are questions to be grappled with and worked through for a lifetime.

If it were easy, we would have it all figured out already. It isn’t easy, but I wonder if it might be *simple*. Simple, that is, in the sense of straightforward and rather obvious. **Perhaps good soil only requires three things: humility enough to hear, imagination and creativity enough to dream, and conviction enough to act.**

Jesus addresses the first one: “But 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.” The ability to hear and understand God’s message is often impeded by our own assumptions, cultural norms, and biases. I believe humility is a necessity when approaching God’s word. We have to recognize that none of us is a blank slate, and

that we all pick and choose the parts of scripture that seem to best fit our predisposed understanding of God. If we are to “walk humbly with God,” we should be prepared to be startled by what we learn when we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit’s work in opening scripture to us.

To be good soil, we must also have the imagination and creativity to dream, to be able to see beyond what is already happening toward what might be possible. This part is best done with other people. The best ideas and possibilities often come when a diversity of voices and perspectives are present—especially if they involve dreams of systemic, cultural change in the world. Even if the changes we seek to make are strictly personal, however, having others walk with us in our journey of faith can help us affirm and change course as necessary.

And finally, to be good soil we must have the conviction to act. While the hearing and the dreaming may happen internally, this third piece is the outpouring of what God is doing within us for the world, our response to what we have learned and received. This may be the most important part of being good soil, but it is also oftentimes the hardest part. Living what we believe, acting on our convictions, and persevering in the face of resistance are not for the faint-hearted.

Nevertheless, this parable calls us to be good soil, to hear and then to respond. Luckily, one grain of sand never makes for good soil; we need a lot of dirt, all bound together. Together, we can bear fruit, nourishing one another and faithfully following God.