



## SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

Isaiah 55:10-13

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,  
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.  
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.  
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.

### **Matthew 13:1-9,18-23**

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

"Hear then the parable of the Sower. When 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. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet 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. As 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. 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, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

*Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.*

In seeking to squeeze a lesson from this parable, I am becoming the very treacherous soil described in the parable! It is inadvisable for a wisdom teacher to lack the wisdom to discern a particular direction to go. Not so wise I might say.

I’m wondering if I am the sower, the seed, or the soil. All of my mentors seem to say something different. If I could let go of my ego-driven logic and my need to write something definitive, perhaps the answer to the question, “Who am I in this parable?” is simply, “Yes.”

At times I am the rocky soil; other times I am thorny, and too often I am hard-hearted. On other occasions, I think I am the seed.

The only thing I can be sure of is I am not the Sower in this parable.

In most of my object lessons I have made the seed primary to the parable. I have also picked up the journey of the seed once it already reached good soil. I have focused on the protective shell as the ego that protects the seeds DNA destiny. The outer shell, the will, must be broken to grow.

Today, as I read this parable anew, I am reminded of Barbara Brown Taylor’s reflection:

“If this is really the parable of the Sower and not the parable of the different kinds of ground, then it begins to sound quite new. The focus is not on us and our shortfalls but on the generosity of our Maker, the prolific Sower who does not obsess about the condition of the fields, who is not stingy with the seed but who casts it everywhere.”

With the wisdom of Barb, the Sower is flinging seeds indiscriminately, everywhere, and anywhere. Like rain falling on all things, so do the seeds fall everywhere from the reckless hand of grace.

I'm uncomfortable with a God who doesn't take care where the seeds land. So, I must think a little bigger. Lean into the uncomfortable as they say.

Perhaps, just because a seed is flung onto rocks or thorns, it doesn't mean it can't be blown onto some good soil. My dualistic mind could not see this! We are not merely victims; we are the challenged.

Here's another possibility. Perhaps our hard exterior, or our instinct for self-protection serves a purpose for a time. It protects us from the kingdoms of the world until we find ourselves in the rich manure of daily existence. The invitation is to accept our present condition and become fully present to *what is* in this season of life. It is in the contemplative embrace of the good, the bad, and the ugly that we can face the winds of change with mindful, creative, and imaginative Presence.

Wait...what? A third way to see beyond seeds and soil?

Maybe it has been about the invisible powerful breath of God. The energy of God that makes all things right. The very breath of Spirit that brings life. In Hebrew, The *Ruach*.

In my life, I have often found myself in circumstances that seemed untenable. If I had truly been doomed by those circumstances, I would not have been rescued over and over again. Time and again, I have needed the winds of change to bring me home.

It has taken some mighty winds to blow me out of some of the places I've gotten myself into. My situations usually occurred because I lacked the wisdom to "Be still" and remember I am not God.

Psalm 1 reminds us that when wisdom takes root, we will be like trees planted by streams of living water. So, I guess count it all joy when you land in manure!

For me, today, the parable is about the unmentioned wind.

It makes me think of the Biosphere in Oracle, Arizona. A massive three plus acre glass and steel domed enclosure with mini-artificial ecosystems built in. A Rainforest, Coral Reef, Wetlands, Savannah and Coastal Desert. These brilliant scientists replicated every condition needed for any environment to flourish. Except one.

Due to optimal conditions created for fast growth, the one thing they didn't factor in was wind. It was discovered when the trees reached a certain height, they could not bear their own weight. Their trunks began to droop, and the branches became brittle and snapped.

Wind causes stress on a tree, and the tree develops "stress wood" which is a defensive response to the winds which makes the wood thicken and the trunk become stronger. The roots will deepen and the tree is able to mature and bear fruit.

No wonder James chapter one describes a person lacking wisdom as potentially driven by the false winds of quick fixes and self-indulgence. Some drift out to the middle of the ocean attempting to keep all their options open as I have. Amid the stinky manure, I am unwilling to be still where I am planted. According to James the person who stays grounded in wisdom will not shout at the wind but will count it all joy as trials like clouds floating by in the vastness of the sky. Like clouds, our anguish will pass and our roots will grow deep.