

Sermon
6 Pentecost—Proper 10-A
St. Andrew's, Methuen
July 12, 2020
William Bradbury

Isaiah 55:10-13
Psalm 65: (1-8), 9-14
Romans 8:1-11
Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

Did you have a tree house when you were a kid? We had more of a tree platform in our small neighborhood in Atlanta but it was great fun.

I know a guy who wanted to build a tree house for his 6-year-old son. He said to him, **"Here's the deal: I am only going to work on this project when you are working on it with me."**

As you might imagine, it took a long time for that treehouse to get built. Every time the kid failed to show up or showed up and then got bored and walked away, the father would lay down his tools and go inside.

In the parable of the sower today, Jesus is telling us his Father is building the realm of God—that One New Humanity in Christ Paul talks about in Ephesians 2

--but only where and when we show up to help with the project.

And like that six-year-old, there are lots of things that keep us from helping.

Jesus outlines a three of those ways in the Parable of the Sower:

The hard path: Sometimes we don't understand what Jesus is up to. We don't understand the powerful compassion of the Father that wants to transform the whole world, not just my world, here and now.

We think all Jesus wants is for us to be nice to the people in our social circle and then when we die, we'll go to heaven where we can continue to enjoy every comfort, so we **become hard-hearted** and the seed of the Kingdom bounces off and gets carried away by the powers of this world that are more than happy to keep creating more suffering.

Rocky Ground: We are excited to be part of God's project! We show up for worship, or Bible study or at the food bank to volunteer, but then we find out it's going to take us out of our comfort zone.

"You mean I've got to welcome lots of strangers into **MY** church so they can sit in **MY** pew? You mean you want me to help dismantle systems of oppression?"

Thorny Ground: Then there are times we hear the Word of Christ, but we're really busy, and then we realize it also involves our wealth: "You mean I've got to give a percentage of MY income for the work of Christ in this church?"

To build the kingdom you mean Christ expects a tithe, not a tip?

We become that man who is being baptized in a river and just before he goes under water, he grabs his wallet and holds it up in the air, to make clear that he has no intention of letting Christ get at his money.

You couldn't tell by how we talk in church, but Jesus has way more to say about our money, than about our sex.

One example: "No one can serve two masters: Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve both God and money.**" Matthew 6:24

Let's be honest: All three conditions--hard path, rocky soil, thorny ground are in each of us. **"Yeah, we'd like to have that treehouse, but not if I have to break a sweat and get emotionally and financially involved."**

This produces sentimental religion.

Sentimental Christianity forgets that the cross of Jesus isn't an 18-carat gold piece of jewelry, but a first century lynching of a homeless Jew by a state-sponsored mob.

Sentimental Christians want their sins forgiven, but they do not want to get their hands dirty helping the Father construct One New Humanity, which is the Realm of God, on earth as it is in heaven.

It's ironic. Sentimental Christianity wants to feel warm and sweet at church, but doesn't want to feel the suffering of others. For what we don't feel, we don't need to change.

Good soil: Jesus says there is also good soil in us, but he leaves out one detail that would have been obvious to his hearers: **in that culture the seed is sown first, then the ground is plowed.**

To be good soil we must be willing not only to receive the seed but also the plow--to break us open so the seed can fall in and do its work.

And what breaks us open? To feel the suffering of others—**Walking a mile in another’s shoes.**

I think today of Ruby Bridges—you remember that adorable 6-year-old Black girl who on November 14, 1960 is escorted by U.S. Marshalls to her first day at the all-white William Franz Elementary School in New Orleans. When she arrives, white parents pull their children out of school. The teachers refuse to teach her.

Some of you will remember Norman Rockwell’s painting of Ruby with the Marshalls, titled “The Problem We All Live With”.

Now, picture Ruby Bridges in her white sweater over a lovely dress, black shoes, and a white ribbon in her hair. She’s carrying a small satchel. A sweet 6-year-old girl.

Can you see her? Now imagine the screaming protesters and the teachers who refuse to teach her. You see a protestor carrying a sign that says, “All I Want for Christmas is a Clean White School”.

Can you see her?

Now imagine Ruby is your child?

That’s my 6-year-old Katie bouncing out of the car to take on her first day of school at Eastern Elementary, Washington, North Carolina, brimming with innocence and excitement, to be met by parents and teachers who hate her and refuse to see the glory of who she is?

You do that to my child?!

They do that to your child?!

Well, why not, we did it to God’s child 2000 years ago. From the murder of Abel by his brother Cain, to the murder of George Floyd, WE, not they, have been doing it to God’s children, because our hearts are full of hardness, rocks, and thorns. **Our minds are focused on the things of the flesh, says Saint Paul, on preserving our security and our success, and not on the things of the Spirit—the empathy of Christ for our neighbors.**

IN this space, when you walk to the altar to receive communion you walk under the crucified Jesus, who is pouring his empathy upon all who have grown numb to the suffering of others.

As you probably know, but which I just learned, there was one teacher at that school who was willing to teach Ruby. They put them together---**in a classroom---by themselves—for the whole school year.**

That teacher was Barbara Henry from Boston, Massachusetts.

When Jesus appears in the upper room on Easter evening it isn't for **revenge**. Rather, it is for **recruitment**—to call us to join him in the project of New Creation, building One New Humanity, the Realm of God. A safe place where all the children of God can learn and play.

It's never too late to show up to build with Christ. It's never too late to offer our prayer in the words of the poet: "Plow us true."