

Bible Reading: Matthew 13:2-9

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!”

“To act lovingly is to begin to feel loving, and certainly to act joyfully brings joy to others which in turn makes one feel joyful. I believe we are called to the duty of delight.”

Dorothy Day

God sowing joy

Like many others, my life has taken down a different way the last 6 months. I used to do a lot of stuff, sing my heart out in a choir, go out and have fun with groups of friends and people and putting on my mascara every day. I used to meet people to talk about my PhD, travel to conferences to get inspirational thoughts and not pass all the time in front of my laptop. I used to enjoy hugging people.

Now I basically just work in my apartment, talk on the phone, sometimes, if I get one of the limited places, I go to the library. Buying groceries or getting something from the post office became more exciting than ever, giving the day some more structure. Going for a run in the forest gives me a little time out to breathe and let my thoughts flow outside my own four walls.

And in all this time, I fear that I have felt less joy. Less joy and more judgement. I judge myself for being lazy, for not having a hobby without purpose, for not cleaning the apartment, for not being mindful to myself or attentive enough to others. I judge others for not caring enough about this and that. From my little place in Giesing, basically I hold court every day.

But this week I became aware that feeling self-satisfied is not the same as feeling joy. Remember the trees in the Garden Eden: The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And human sin was choosing knowledge of good and evil over knowledge of God – we could choose to know God and have life, or we could choose to try and be like God by constantly judging good and evil. It seems that often we choose poorly.

Let me show you what I mean by that. Our Gospel reading today is about the Sower. Usually we may read this parable quickly as the parable of the judgement of the soil and not first as the parable of the Sower. But look, maybe the central thing about this parable isn't judgement at all, maybe it is joy – because again and again in the midst of this thorny and rocky and good world, God is sowing a life-giving Word. Just indiscriminately scattering it everywhere like God doesn't understand our rules.

The Word of the Lord brings good news to the poor, and comforts those who mourn. Whatever heals the brokenhearted, whatever opens prisons. The Word is whatever brings freedom to slaves, to former slaves and to the descendants of former slaves. God's Word liberates the world from the spiritual bondage of human bondage. God's Word is scattered all around us... joyfully scrawled on protest signs and seen in city streets and shopping stores. The Word of the Lord shines out of the corners of our broken hearts, it is spread in the laughter of the children.

And all this happens without *our* soil management, because we saw that it's not the parable of the judgement of the soil, but of the Sower. So maybe to focus on the playful and even ridiculous image of how God extravagantly sows the Word of the Kingdom, is to read the parable in joy instead of judgement. And isn't life just too short, too sacred and too important to leave joy out? Isn't the world too right all the time to forgo joy? Yet joy can so often be the thing I give up when being right seems more important. When the grief of what I lost seems so much bigger than the hope of what might happen in the future. We live in such a serious and a fearful time. A time when we wonder what place there is for joy.

Listen to some Words of the prophet Isaiah as he says: "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." (Isaiah 55,12–13)

What a fantastical joyful image! And imagine, Isaiah wrote these words to the people in Babylonian exile – a people in a situation where they had lost everything they had ever known. So, it's not that Isaiah lacked analysis or did not perceive the gravity of this situation. It's not that Isaiah didn't see right and wrong... after all, he was a prophet. But sometimes it's not the job of the prophet to judge right and wrong, but to point God's people to joy. To remind us that our God delights in us. To remind us of our true home.

What would it be like to rather than judging the supposed imperfection of your body and mind, to experience the joy of being a beautiful perfect creation, made in the image of God? What

would it be like, rather than judging the unhealthy grocery cart contents of the guy behind me at Aldi who also isn't wearing his mask up to his nose, to instead experience the joy of seeing Christ's own face in his face? What would it be like to, rather than judging the weakness of every person or institution, and instead become aware to the joy of God's kingdom imperfectly and unevenly breaking in on all of us? I'm not sure. But I'm in to find out and learn. Today I want to choose joy. And leave being right to God alone.

Amen.

This reflection is inspired by thoughts from Nadia Bolz-Weber.