



THE MEANING OF SEXAGESIMA IS SOMEWHAT OBSCURE. IT COMES EITHER BY ANALOGY FROM QUINQUAGESIMA OR BECAUSE OF DIFFERENT RULES LIKE THOSE REFERRED TO LAST SUNDAY, WHICH MEANS THAT LENT IS CLOSE TO BEGINNING.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER, WHICH IS THE GOSPEL FOR THIS SUNDAY, IS AN IMPORTANT PARABLE THAT COMES FROM DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS AND PEOPLE! MIGHT MORE ACCURATELY BE CALLED THE "PARABLE OF THE FOUR KINDS OF SOIL." THE SKILL OF THE SOWER AND THE QUALITY OF THE SEED ARE NOT QUESTIONED, THE RESULTS OF THE SOWING DEPENDS MUCH UPON THE RESPONSE OF THE HEARER. WHO IS THIS SOWER? OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR.

SOME SEED FELL ON A HARD PATHWAY BESIDE THE FIELD AND WAS AT ONCE SNATCHED UP BY THE BIRDS-THE HEARERS RECOGNIZE THE TRUTH OF THE WORD, BUT SOMETIMES LACK THE MORAL STRENGTH TO FOLLOW IT. SOME SEED FELL ON SHALLOW SOIL, WITH ROCK UNDERNEATH, AND IT GERMINATED RAPIDLY, BUT HAD NOT ENOUGH ROOTS TO ENABLE IT TO SURVIVE THE DRY WEATHER. SOME SEED FALLS ON ROUGH, UN-WEEDED GROUND, WHERE IT IS CHOKED BY THORNS. THE HEARERS CANNOT CONCENTRATE AND ARE DISTRACTED BY WORLDLY CARES WHICH OFTEN CHOKES A LIFE OF FAITH.

SOME SEED, HOWEVER, FALLS ON GOOD GROUND AND PRODUCES AN ABUNDANT HARVEST-"THOSE ON THE GOOD GROUND ARE THEY WHICH, IN AN HONEST AND GOOD HEART, HAVING HEARD THE WORD, KEEP IT, AND BRING FORTH OUR FAITH." THE SEED IS FOUNDED ON THE DAILY EXPERIENCE OF FARMING IN PALESTINE. THE SOWER, WITH HIS BASKET SECURED ON ONE SHOULDER, CANNOT ALWAYS CHOOSE WHERE THE SEED

SHALL LAND. THE FIELDS ARE OF UNEVEN FERTILITY. OUTCROPS OF ROCK, THEN PATCHES OF SOIL AND PLACES WHERE THE WEEDS GROW, THE SEED FALLS ON THEM AS WELL AS ON THE RICH PRODUCTIVE AREAS. THERE IS A THOUGHT ABOUT THE SOWER WHO MUST SCATTER WIDELY IF HE IS TO ENSURE A GOOD CROP.

THE DISCIPLES ASKED JESUS WHAT THE PARABLE MEANT. HE SAID, "IT IS GIVEN TO YOU TO KNOW THE SECRETS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

IN THIS PARABLE, JESUS USES A PICTURE THAT ALL OF HIS HEARERS SHOULD RECOGNIZE. IT IS IN FACT QUITE LIKELY THAT HE WAS LOOKING AT SOME SOWER WHO WAS SOWING HIS SEED AS HE SPOKE.

THE PARABLE SPEAKS OF FOUR KINDS OF GROUND.

1. THE COMMON GROUND IN PALESTINE WAS SPLIT INTO LONG NARROW STRIPS; BETWEEN THE STRIPS THERE WERE PATHS WHICH WERE RIGHTS OF WAY; WHEN THE SEED FELL ON THESE PATHS, WHICH WERE BEATEN AS HARD AS THE ROAD, IT HAD NO CHANCE OF GROWING.
2. THERE WAS THE ROCKY GROUND. THIS DOES NOT MEAN GROUND THAT WAS FULL OF STONES BUT GROUND WHICH WAS ONLY A THIN SKIN OF EARTH OVER A SHELF OF LIMESTONE ROCK. IN SUCH GROUND THERE WAS NO MOISTURE OR NOURISHMENT, AND THE GROWING PLANT WAS BOUND TO WHITHER AND DIE.
3. THE GROUND WHICH WAS FULL OF THORNS WAS GROUND WHICH AT THE MOMENT LOOKED CLEAN ENOUGH.. BUT THE SEEDS OF THE WEEDS AND THE

FIBROUS ROOTS OF THE WILD GRASSES HAD BEEN LEFT. THE GOOD SEED AND THE WEEDS GREW TOGETHER, BUT THE LIFE WAS CHOKED OUT OF THE GOOD SEED.

4. THE GOOD GROUND WAS DEEP, CLEAN AND WELL PREPARED.

THERE ARE SEVERAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THIS PARABLE FROM THEOLOGIANs.

1. IT IS SUGGESTED THAT IT MEANS THAT THE FAITH OF THE WORD OF GOD DEPENDS ON THE HEART INTO WHICH IT IS SOWN.

A. THE HARD PATH REPRESENTS THE SHUT MIND, THE MIND WHICH REFUSES TO TAKE THE FAITH IN.

B. THE SHALLOW GROUND REPRESENTS THOSE WHO ACCEPT THE WORD BUT WHO NEVER THINK IT OUT AND NEVER REALIZE ITS CONSEQUENCES AND WHO THEREFORE STRUGGLE MIGHTILY.

C. THE THORNY GROUND STANDS FOR THOSE WHOSE LIVES ARE SO BUSY THAT THE THINGS AND WORDS OF GOD GET CROWDED OUT.

D. THE GOOD GROUND STANDS FOR THE GOOD HEARER. GOOD HEARERS DO THREE THINGS. FIRST, WE LISTEN ATTENTIVELY. SECOND, WE KEEP WHAT WE HEAR IN OUR MINDS AND HEARTS AND WE WORK UNTIL WE DISCOVER ITS MEANING. THIRD, WE ACT UPON IT. WE TRANSLATE WHAT WE HAVE HEARD INTO ACTION.

2. MANY THEOLOGIANS SUGGEST THAT THE PARABLE IS REALLY A CORRECTION AGAINST DESPAIR. THINK OF THE SITUATION. JESUS HAS BEEN BANISHED FROM THE SYNAGOGUES. THE SCRIBES AND THE PHARISEES AND THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS ARE AGAINST HIM. INEVITABLY THE DISCIPLES WOULD BE DISHEARTENED FOR A TIME. IT IS TO THEM JESUS SPEAKS THIS PARABLE AND IN IT HE SAYS, “EVERY FARMER KNOWS THAT SOME OF HIS SEED WILL BE LOST; IT DOESN’T ALL GROW. BUT THAT DOES NOT DISCOURAGE HIM OR MAKE HIM STOP SOWING BECAUSE HE KNOWS THAT, THE HARVEST WILL BE STRONG. I KNOW WE HAVE OUR SETBACKS AND OUR DISCOURAGEMENTS; I KNOW WE OCCASIONALLY HAVE OUR ENEMIES AND OUR OPPONENTS; BUT IN THE END THE HARVEST IS SURE.”

FROM THE BOOK “LETTER TO LUKE”:

TONIGHT, JESUS CAME INTO THE CLINIC FOR A MEETING WITH HIS DISCIPLES AND OTHER FOLLOWERS. WE WERE ALL SITTING IN THE LARGE ROOM AND HE WAS SITTING ON A TABLE IN FRONT OF EVERYONE. AFTER DISCUSSING THE WRITINGS OF DAVID AND THE PSALMS THAT HE WROTE, JESUS TOLD THIS PARABLE.

“ A SOWER WENT TO SOW HIS SEED. AS HE SOWED, SOME FELL ON THE EDGE OF THE PATH AND WAS TRAMPLED ON, AND THE BIRDS OF THE AIR ATE IT UP. SOME SEED FELL ON ROCK, AND WHEN IT CAME UP IT WITHERED AWAY, HAVING NO MOISTURE. SOME SEED FELL AMONG THORNS AND THE THORNS GREW WITH IT AND CHOKED IT.

AND SOME SEED FELL INTO RICH SOIL AND GREW AND PRODUCED ITS CROP A HUNDREDFOLD.” THEN HE STOPPED FOR JUST A MOMENT.

“LISTEN, ANYONE WHO HAS EARS TO HEAR!” HE CRIED OUT, RISING TO HIS FEET. JESUS IS FRUSTRATED.

SOME MURMURING AMONG SMALL GROUPS BROKE THE SILENCE OF THE CROWD. EVEN THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS SEEMED CONFUSED, AND THOMAS ASKED HIM, “WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?”

“THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD ARE REVEALED TO YOU.” JESUS SAID LOOKING AT HIM, THEN CATCHING THE EYES OF EACH OF US ROUND THE ROOM. “FOR THE REST THERE ARE ONLY PARABLES, SO THAT THEY MAY SEE BUT PERHAPS NOT PERCEIVE, LISTEN BUT NOT UNDERSTAND.”

WE REMAINED QUIET, WANTING TO HEAR MORE OF AN EXPLANATION. JESUS GREW IMPATIENT.

“THIS, THEN, IS WHAT THE PARABLE MEANS:

“THE SEED IS THE WORD OF GOD. THOSE ON THE EDGE OF THE PATH ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE HEARD IT, AND THEN THE DEVIL COMES TRYING TO CARRY AWAY THE WORD FROM OUR HEARTS, IN CASE WE SHOULD BELIEVE AND BE SAVED. THOSE ON THE ROCK ARE PEOPLE WHO, WHEN THEY FIRST HEAR IT, WELCOME THE WORD WITH JOY. BUT THESE HAVE NO ROOT. THEY BELIEVE FOR A WHILE, AND IN TIME OF TRIAL THEY GIVE UP.

“AS FOR THE PART THAT FELL INTO THORNS, THESE ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE HEARD, BUT, AS THEY GO ON THEIR WAY, THEY ARE CHOKED BY THE WORRIES AND RICHES AND PLEASURES OF LIFE AND DO NOT REACH MATURITY IN THE FAITH.

“AS FOR THE PART IN THE RICH SOIL, THESE ARE PEOPLE WITH A NOBLE AND GENEROUS HEART WHO HAVE HEARD THE WORD AND TAKE IT TO THEMSELVES AND YIELD A HARVEST THROUGH THEIR PERSEVERANCE.”

ALL WAS QUIET. BUT JESUS WAS NOT FINISHED.

“NO ONE LIGHTS A LAMP TO COVER IT WITH A BOWL OR TO PUT IT UNDER A BED. NO, HE PUTS IT ON A LAMP STAND SO THAT PEOPLE MAY SEE THE LIGHT WHEN THEY COME IN. FOR NOTHING IS HIDDEN BUT IT WILL BE MADE CLEAR, NOTHING SECRET BUT IT WILL BE KNOWN AND BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

“SO TAKE CARE HOW YOU HEAR, FOR ANYONE WHO DID SO WILL BE GIVEN MORE, OR ANYONE WHO HAS NOT, EVEN WHAT HE THINKS HE HAS, WILL BE TAKEN AWAY.” AFTER THIS HE STOPPED BUT THIS TIME HE DID NOT EXPLAIN. THE CROWD BROKE UP INTO SMALL GROUPS TO DISCUSS THESE TEACHINGS AND JESUS LEFT QUIETLY.

I SHARE THE WORDS FROM THE SERMON HYMN:

“ALMIGHTY GOD THY WORD IS CAST LIKE SEED INTO THE GROUND. NOW LET THE DEW OF HEAVEN DESCEND AND RIGHTEOUS FRUITS ABOUND. LET NOT THE FOE OF CHRIST AND MAN, THIS HOLY SEED REMOVE, BUT GIVE IT ROOT IN EVERY HEART TO BRING FORTH FAITH AND LOVE.”