

NRS Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,

4 so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

7 For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law-- indeed it cannot,

8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

10 But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

NRS Matthew 13:1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.

2 Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach.

3 And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow.

4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up.

5 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.

6 But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away.

7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

8 Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

9 Let anyone with ears listen!"

18 "Hear then the parable of the sower.

19 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.

20 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;

21 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.

22 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.

23 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."

Loving Creator, shine as a light before me that you may be seen and not I. Give me words that I may speak, give us ears that we may hear, and through your Holy Spirit help us understand. Amen.

It has been a bit frustrating for me not being able to do my normal gardening this summer. With one arm I am a bit limited in my gardening abilities. But I do still like watching nature all around me, and I particularly enjoy watching seeds grow.

There are few seeds I've been watching around the parsonage yard.

Directly behind the library are two trees in our yard one of them is the lovely copper beech, and the other is a tall majestic oak tree. I've been told that oak trees produce acorns every second year, and it appears that last year was a good year for acorns. All around in the lawn on that side of the house we have teeny little oak trees popping up out of the grass.

An oak tree of this size probably produces hundreds of acorns, if not thousands. The reason it does this is that most of that seeds will never become trees. The squirrels in the yard certainly enjoy them, they probably hold off a lion's share of them for their own consumption. Kinda like beer nuts for squirrels.

The ones that did not get harvested by the squirrels had at least a small chance of becoming trees. The big problem is that most of these landed in our lawn. I like oak trees as much as the next person, but we're not going to allow 75 oak trees to come up in our lawn, they are going to be mowed down. So, when our son Joseph goes out to cut the grass, the oak trees are cut down, and, by the end of the season, none of these babies will survive to become trees.

There are probably some of the acorns that fell in better places, places where the grass will not be cut, and they may have a chance to begin their lives as trees. The chances are still good that none of them will wind up staying where they are, but we might dig them up at some point and move them to a better place, a place where we want an oak tree to grow.

Another one of the seeds I've been watching have been seeds of pumpkins. Last summer I saved pumpkin seeds from some pumpkins we grew and planted that those in the garden behind the house. That was about the extent of my gardening for this summer: sticking some pumpkin seeds in a compost pile, not too difficult.

What I had left, I scattered around the yard, figuring that the birds would come and eat them up. It is amazing though how seeds want to become plants and a number of those

pumpkin seeds sprouted also in the lawn. And, just like the baby oak trees, these baby pumpkin plants were destined to become mulch as the lawn mower found them.

One of the things I love about the parables is how down to earth and they are. This week's gospel reading about seeds is certainly down to earth, in more ways than one.

Jesus tells of a sower who sow seeds. The seeds land on various types of soil. Many of them land in places where they will never be able to grow and fulfill their potential. They land on the path, they land on the rocks, they land among the thorns, and others land in fertile soil.

Jesus taught with stories. He used concrete examples to help people make sense of things that are not particularly concrete. In this case, he actually explains what he was talking about.

The word of God is sent out like seeds into the world. In some cases those seeds never find any soil whatsoever, and they are removed as quickly as they fell; some people can never hear the word of God. Other seeds landed where the soil was thin; some people hear the word, but it is only received in a shallow way, and they quickly lose heart. Still others landed in good soil but were choked out; some hear the word gladly, but the things of the world draw them away from the word, and they too are lost.

Then there are some that land in fertile soil; there are some who hear the word, and they grow in the word, and they produce good fruit.

In some ways I wish Jesus had not given an explanation for this parable, because I think we still can find meaning in it beyond simply what he has shared with us in his explanation.

I talked about our robins in the yard earlier. It has been a wonderful thing to see as the robins began making their nest in the spring. Then we had four eggs appear. After checking in my bird book, it said that robin's eggs hatch after 12th to 14 days. So we watched, and we waited.

What concerned me was that the place these robins chose to build their nest was right by the front door. If every time anyone walked up and down the driveway the birds would fly away, every time Tom came with the mail, the birds would fly away, every time anyone came to the door, the birds would fly away. I don't think that can be good for eggs which need to be kept warm all the time.

It was about day 15 we noticed that one of the eggs was gone, the next day another one was gone, and the next day another, and finally the last. I have a strong feeling that because the nest was in a place where the parents were continually spooked by our presence, the eggs were not able to hatch.

It was a day after the last day disappeared from the first nest, the same pair of robins began building a second nest, this time it was not on the windowsill near the front door, it was in the little peak directly over the front door. This time we could not see eggs appear, but, by the way that the parents sat on the nest, we figured they had in fact laid eggs in the new nest.

The problem was that this nest was also right by the front door, and, every time we went by, the birds would fly away same as they did the first time. About two weeks went by, and that nest was also abandoned.

We knew that the robins were still around because we saw them in the front yard, doing their shopping, picking up worms and what ever else it is the robins eat. But we did not see a new nest appear. Last week, I was walking up the driveway when I saw one of the robins fly into a bush, and there, in the bush, was a young robin. It was already fledged, but it was out of the way and hiding so that mama could get it something to eat. It appears that this time mama and daddy robin were successful.

How often do we try something only to find that it did not work out? And then we try something quite similar, and that doesn't work either?

I know that Jesus wanted us to hear this parable and to think of ourselves as being like the seeds that are planted. We might land on the path, or in the rocky soil, or in the thorns, or on the fertile ground. But what if we think of this parable from a different perspective?

What if we are the sower? We are the ones planting seeds and trying new things in life. Some of the seeds we plant never even to start to grow, some of the seeds we plant start to grow quickly but are then scorched, some of the seeds we plant begin to grow quickly and then we lose our enthusiasm, or life becomes too busy, and they are choked out, and then some of the seeds we plant are able to take root and grow fully.

I think we can see this with children. Lots of children will sign up for gymnastics, or dance, or soccer, or baseball or all of these at the same time. They will also want to go horseback riding, take art lessons, join the swim team, and study one thing or another in school. The reality is that not all of these things will become a part of their lives.

It is impossible in this life to focus on everything without losing a sense of who you really are. We must all make choices in life about what is important and what is not. What we can do and what we can't.

When I was a kid I enjoyed playing baseball, studying science, reading books, playing golf, and fishing. I wasn't all that great a baseball, so that one fell away pretty easily. I wasn't all that great of golf either, but it was the cost and the time commitment that kept me from continuing my golf game. Fishing also required time I didn't really have, and I haven't fished in years. Studying science I still do-particularly watching how nature works, I also still read books.

I've also found that one of the things I need in my life is in fact the Word of God, I need my church, I need my faith. These are seeds that I find more important than all the others. That seed has grown and become like the majestic oak tree outside the parsonage.

Of all the seeds that I've planted in my life that is perhaps the one I Cherish the most. Like the oak tree in the front yard, it now provides shade and comfort from the heat of summer day, it provides beauty, and it even nourishes the little squirrels that run around the yard.

We do have a choice in this life of where we're going to put our energies, how we're going to use our resources. We can't do it all. And the question is what are we choosing?

Jesus says that seeds planted in fertile soil will produce 30 and 60 and a hundredfold. Were you planting your seeds?

Thanks be to God.
AMEN.