

Let us pray... God our Creator, true source of wisdom, whom all life flows, plant your word in our hearts today. May your truth take root and may your grace blossom in this place, cracking open the seed of love, where tendrils of hope bloom and grow... Amen.

For those of you unfamiliar with Aldo Leopold, he was a naturalist from the early 1900's. He wrote some beautiful essays of which are compiled in his book, A Sand County Almanac.

One entrancing essay of his, is the Good Oak, where he writes, "There are two spiritual dangers in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery, and the other that heat comes from the furnace.

To avoid the first danger, one should plant a garden, preferably where there is no grocer to confuse the issue. To avoid the second, he should lay a split of good oak on the and-irons, preferably where there is no furnace, and let it warm his shins while a February blizzard tosses the trees outside."

He then continues by sharing a time that he cut down a good oak. In this section he brilliantly combines history with sawblade and takes you on a journey through time as his sawblade tears through the rings of the good oak.

For example, he shares how Wisconsin received its first starling in 1923, and how, in 1906 Wisconsin's first state forester took office. He shares fact after fact as his sawblade cuts back through time...

Years when there were droughts, floods, fires, and dustbowls.

Because tree rings embody history... They tell a story and they hold many stories...

In fact, tree rings have been used to recreate weather records from before records were even kept...

Smaller rings indicate drought, and wider rings indicate growth and more rain.

And since trees can live for many years, trees become solid pillars of past sunlight, making wood and holding history in each fiber...

And if you think about trees in this way, then any plant for that matter holds history and is impacted by the environment in which it grows.

Like we heard about in the parable of the sower, how the fate of each seed was dependent upon where it landed, and was impacted by the quality of the soil.

And the best options seem to be the seeds sown in rich soil, because they are the ones that thrive, producing the most fruit... Which entices the listener to think that it is up to them to till up good soil in oneself...

But the thing about rocky ground or fertile soil is... it cannot change itself... Instead, soil is changed by the environment that it is in and the microorganisms that are present or not present in it.

For example, if someone takes time to water the soil or provide it with proper nutrients drawing in proper microorganisms it can change and become more fertile...

Because soil is communal act, and fertile soil depends upon many things, much of which are out of its control.

Which is something, I'm guessing, most of us can relate to...

For example, you can do your very best to be happy, energized, prepared, so you feel alive and ready to seize the day...

But then something out of your control happens... Someone says something hurtful or rude... A loved one gets sick or dies... A series of unfortunate events take root in your life... Or things don't go as planned.

Because there are many things out of our control and many things weigh on us.

And there are things we are impacted by that we don't even realize...

Things we don't know how to process and things we fail to process because they hurt too much...

Such as unprocessed trauma, or unhealed relationships that have left residues of brokenness floating within.

We are further influenced by unconscious thoughts or fears that motivate us in ways we can't comprehend.

Leaving us with days that are hard... Days when you may try to muster up a little bit of joy, but you find it withering away, like the plants that sprang up in our parable along the rocky ground...

Which is why today's parable is for every person... Because every kind of ground the seeds land on, are like the many different paths that make up our lives...

We live through rocky seasons, fertile seasons, stolen seasons, and burnt-out seasons... Sometimes these seasons may last years, other times you might experience all of them in one day...

But the good news is... God continually provides to all places...

God doesn't just pick the best soil to sow seeds... God chooses all kinds of soil, and all varieties of environments. Because God's seed is for all people and places...

God loves all parts of creation, even the rocky places, even the thorny places. Even the places that don't have time to take root and are carried to the skies by birds.

God continually shows up and sows in those places too.

And if we are part of this vast and loved ecosystem, and if plants and soil are dependent upon circumstances out of their control, then we need to become stewards for the goodness of all creation...

Meaning it is up to us to create nurturing and fertile environments, especially for the places that are in need of a little extra love...

Which, at times, may even include yourself...

Because just as plants are unable to weed around themselves, or water themselves... We too need outside help, and so do our neighbors....

For things to work together for good, we need to work together...

To notice when others need help and to acknowledge when you might be in a rough patch...

To notice what season you are in without judgment...

Because that's the thing about life, it is always changing... Every day is different and every year holds a unique past...

A past that we can see through many things, even in the rings of a tree...

Because every new tree ring holds a rich history and was impacted by the environment in which it grew...

As it is with us... We too are impacted year after year, or day after day, or hour after hour...

Our circumstances become a part of us just like rings become a part of a tree...

Because we all hold onto so much... We hold onto good things, not so good things, and terrible things... They become a part of us, and part of our rings of life, even when we do our best to let things go...

Which is why this parable offers such great news...

No matter what you are going through... No matter what path you may find yourself on... No matter what...

God is there for you... Reaching out to you tossing you seeds of God's word... Seeds of love and seeds of grace...

And though it may be hard sometimes to hold onto those seeds, finding them withering away under the weight of the world...

The seeds will never stop... There will be more and more every day...

Which means that we have boundless opportunities to shine God's light and to cultivate environments that all seeds can thrive in.

And when they do, just think of all the fruit they will produce, as Jesus said the yield may be a hundredfold... Amen.