



See with the Eyes of your Heart

*Homily by Lisa Wiens Heinsobn given July 16, 2017
Matthew 13:1--23, Proper 10A*

As many of you know today our youth minister Adam Estrem is leading the youth groups on an annual weekly service trip to White Earth, the Ojibwe Native American reservation about four hours northwest of here, an hour east of Fargo. I myself have not yet had the privilege to go to White Earth, but our Rector Tom is going for the whole week this year. What is perhaps most amazing about this trip is that Adam leads his youth group without a set agenda. They go up north and arrive ready to listen and to serve in whatever way the tribe wants them to. In fact what I've heard universally described about this trip is this. If you are going to go, whatever your expectations, agendas, or plans have been in the past, throw them out. Your clipboards and goals and timelines will be of no value here. Go, open your eyes, open your hearts, get ready for the unexpected, and show up to listen, be present, and serve. The reasons for this are many, but the lines of historical injustice and oppression run deep, and we find it incredibly important to show up with humility and a willingness to listen, and go from there.

I can't wait to hear what the unique story of this trip will be, because I have no doubt it will be different from any other year, as indeed each trip is. Although I have no experience at White Earth, I had the great good fortune to experience two eight day Lakota prayer ceremonies called Sundances on Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota a number of years ago, and I had one experience I'll never forget. In the first day of the trip, when we were setting up camp and waiting for the Sundancers to arrive, a Lakota elder found his way into my camp. He was traditional, fullblood Lakota, and he chatted with me as I was setting up my tent. He told me

that as I moved through the week, I should see with the eyes of my heart. These eyes, he said, would deceive me. See with the eyes of your heart. It was important to do this, he said, or I would miss what was right in front of me.

This advice, to see with the eyes of our hearts, has been something that is at the heart of every great spiritual tradition that I have ever encountered, and in today's gospel lesson we find it in the teachings of Jesus. In it Jesus tells a parable about a sower who scatters seeds indiscriminately all over the place, which as any farmer or gardener knows is a very strange way to plant seeds. Most of the time people who want gardening success prepare garden beds and plant things in neat rows and maybe even label the rows. They watch anxiously as the sprouts come up and they water the seedlings and put fences around to protect the shoots from rabbits and deer. But not so with this sower. He scatters seed far and wide anywhere he can throw it. And then some of the seed lands on paths, some in rocky places, some among thorns, and only some in what Jesus calls good soil. Although the seeds become plants in three of the four places, only one of them results in fruit: it's the seed that lands in the good soil. And did you notice what was the difference, according to the text? *Understanding* is the difference. Those who do not understand the word of the kingdom are like the seeds that fall on the path, and those who receive the word and understand it are the ones with good soil who produce not just a living plant but fruit. And here, understanding doesn't mean just intellectually grasping something. The definition of the Greek word means having such an intellectual grasp of something that it challenges your thinking and your practice. It is the opposite of having hardness of heart. It means paying attention with willing and receptive engagement, so much so that you have a paradigm shift. It means hearing something that profoundly alters the way you perceive the world.

In the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures that existed at the time of Jesus, this same word for understanding is also the word that is used to mean success or prospering, which might to English ears sound like a strange connection. For example, Moses tells the people of Israel that if they will observe all the words of the covenant that God has given them,

that they will prosper and succeed in their undertaking. That word for prosper is the word for understanding. But before we decide that makes no sense, let's return to what Jesus says in today's gospel text. He implies that understanding – that openhearted listening and being transformed by the Word of God – is alone what makes a person generative, makes a seed sprout into a plant that bears fruit. So prospering, succeeding, bearing fruit, is related to accurately perceiving the Word of the kingdom. And that change in vision, that ability to see and hear what God is up to, is what makes us generative.

Fruit, of course, has seeds in it. Three of the four kinds of seeds in Jesus' parable from today produce plants; so three of them are life-giving. But only one of them produces fruit, fruit with the seeds of future life in it; so only one of them is generative. Only one of them has a role in bringing about the sacred future, the kingdom of God where there is no longer any violence or injustice, but instead the beloved community, the kingdom of God.

What I'd like to suggest to you today is that in actual fact, the seeds of the sacred future, the beloved community, God's great shalom, are all around us all the time, if we can only throw out our own agendas and see with the eyes of our hearts. This is what happened with the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, when the risen Christ appeared to them and walked with them, and their hearts were burning within them, and do you remember why? Because, the text said, Jesus opened their hearts to understand the scriptures, to recognize what was right in front of them. Jesus opened their hearts to understand that what had just happened, the death of Jesus, was not in fact a disaster, because through it God was offering compassion and healing to all people. If you and I have the eyes to see God's creative presence and work around us, we will see God bringing about healing and change and transformation, even if that healing and change is as fragile as a new sprout pushing its way up from the earth.

This week Adam and Tom and the youths are going to go to White Earth, and they already have the intention of throwing out their usual perspectives, softening their agendas, and becoming willing to see with the

eyes of their hearts. Can we join them? This week, I invite you to go about your every day life with a new awareness. I'd invite you to keep Adam and Tom and the youths and the people of White Earth in your prayers. I'd invite you to imagine that what is new, and surprising, and generative might actually be right in front of you, in your ordinary life. Let us, together, look for ways that the Great Story, the sacred story we hear every week at church, gets played out in your home, and in your families, and at work, and in the news. Let us open our hearts to see and receive and understand the word of God, that we might bear fruit with the seeds of the sacred future in it. Together, let us see with the eyes of our hearts.