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"A sower went out to sow" (Mark 4:2).

2 Sam 7:4-14; Mark 4:1-20

The familiar parable of the sower and Jesus' interpretation of its meaning invites us to ask what kind of soil we are. But it also prompts us to ask what kind of sower.

The disciples are eager to understand the parable, and Jesus' attention to their need suggests that it arose because they had questions about their own success and failure as preachers on their recent missionary trips. They had been faithful sowers of the Good News for Jesus in the towns and villages where he was planning to visit. How had they fared? As preachers today can attest, there are moments when they wonder if anyone is listening. People seem distracted, preoccupied, checking their watches, even their cell phones. A smiling face and a nice compliment after the service doesn't mean someone is really paying attention.

Was Jesus encouraging his disciples not to worry about visible results? If they were letting the Word have its own effect, their job was to sow generously and let the Spirit work. The sower in the parable, like the protagonists in other parables, was extravagant to the point of carelessness. His broadcast style was to toss the seed everywhere, even where its chances of germinating seemed limited. On the path,

on rocky soil, among the briars, to the birds, it didn't matter. The return would multiply, and the harvest would happen.

If there was a business plan in Jesus' method, it seems to favor the unlikely. The good shepherd goes after the lost lamb. The housewife turns her house upside down looking for the lost coin. The treasure is waiting in the field to be found. The fine pearl is there for the eye of the beholder. God's bounty finds us if we are open, as were the poor and the outcast Jesus went out to find. Don't worry. Be faithful, and God will measure the success.

This is Pope Francis' view of evangelization. Faith is conveyed not by arguments but in relationships. We attract people to Christ by encountering them, dialoging with them, accompanying them. We will never know the effect of our influence, or on whom. So, to be overly conscious of investing only where we see a possible return, or saving ourselves for promising situations, people we like or hope to impress, is to narrow the scope of the Gospel. Sow generously, give freely, be available, share with everyone, and the Word of God will do the rest.

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