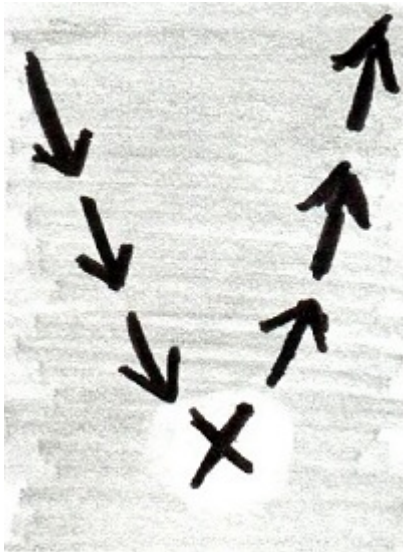


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by Pat Marrin

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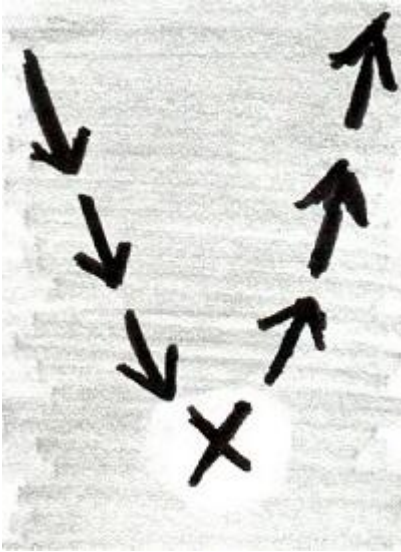
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“I will turn their mourning into joy, I will console and gladden them after their sorrows” (Jeremiah 31:13).

Jer 3:14-17; Matt 13:18-23

Some of the most enduring stories in popular culture are children’s stories. They are structured simply with repetitions that build anticipation, and they are easy to follow and remember. The “Three Little Pigs” and “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” are examples. We see this structure in Jesus’ parable of the Sower. Three successive failures of the seed to take root create real drama for an audience that knew from experience that a failed crop meant a poor harvest and possible starvation for the community.

Some seed falls on the path and is eaten by the birds. Some seed falls on rocky soil, germinates but is burned up by the hot sun. Some falls among thorns and is choked off. An audience of peasant farmers leans in anxiously to hear the end of the parable. The fate of the community hangs in the balance when, suddenly, a turning point occurs when some seed finds good soil and springs up to provide a bountiful harvest.

The parable establishes the theme of the Gospel itself, for Jesus will reach that same turning point after trying to sow the Kingdom of God. His death on the cross will plant the promise of God’s mercy deep in the receptive faith of the first disciples, good soil that will yield Good News for the whole world. Out of despair will spring hope and out of death will come new life.

Today's first reading and responsorial psalm from the prophet Jeremiah echo this theme of a turning point, recalling the return of the people after exile. Even the disaster of conquest and enslavement cannot stop God's long-term fidelity to Judah, and history itself becomes the classroom for restoring the nation through repentance and return. Jesus knew these stories and their pattern of ultimate victory and built them into his parables.

Discipleship is for the long haul and for mature faith. Even in the midst of crisis and apparent failure, we are formed to persevere and to trust in God's presence and guidance through trial and adversity. If the sower can succeed after losing three quarters of the precious seed grain, then we are called to keep sowing until we find good soil. The paschal mystery that became the pattern of our relationship with Jesus at Baptism tells us to expect that risen life with him comes from daily dying to ourselves. In this way our lives become parables for others, who see our faith and know they are not alone.

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