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“A sower went out to sow” (Mark 4:2).

*Heb 10:11-18; Mark 4:1-20*

Among the oral and written sources Mark gathered to compose his Gospel, the parables of Jesus were perhaps the most authentic and well preserved in the faith communities. They were simple and portable, easy to remember and share, part of the staple of the early preachers’ sayings that retained their original form by endless repetition. Despite the multiple layers of editing and literary shaping of the material at hand, we can still encounter the mind of Jesus, a brilliant storyteller who knew just how to convey the mystery of God with vivid imagery and dramatic flair.

The Parable of the Sower has been called a parable about parables, Jesus using a Jewish story form that alerted his hearers that what he was saying had many levels, an entertaining tale on the surface yet loaded with questions and invitations to be pondered and welcomed in the mind and heart of the hearer.

One favored interpretation of the Sower parable, appended to the original by the evangelist, focused on the receptivity of different types of soil. But it could also be a story about the sower, the seed, or the mystery of apparent failure redeemed by the persistence of nature to multiply the harvest. Was it directed to disciples sent to preach with apparent little success, encouraging them to sow generously anyway, trust the seed to succeed? Did it describe the wild extravagance of the Kingdom of

God? Was it a morality tale to get us to be better soil, or was it about God's mercy despite our sinfulness, a bountiful harvest despite our wastefulness and inattention?

Its intended effect seems to have been to create an urgency in the hearers to want God's word to take root in them, to draw closer to the sower, Jesus, whose words were stirring up the desire to follow him in order to have a more abundant life, to fill a deep hunger only God could satisfy. Mark's setting is evocative, depicting an attentive crowd gathering along the shore, the sound of gulls, the water lapping against shore, a gentle evening breeze, a sense of mystery and expectation in the air, a dream whispering in people's hearts at the graciousness of this man telling stories from a boat on the water. "A sower went out to sow."

We are now that audience. A living Word comes to us, and a parable we have heard a hundred times settles again in our imaginations. What does it mean for us now? What images or memories does it evoke in us? Whose voice do we hear, inviting us to draw closer, to let the feeling grow in us to want to be with him? Hear the parable. The whole Gospel is here, waiting for us, when and if we are ready, to let it take root in our hearts, promising us a harvest greater than we can imagine.

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