

**HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 6/17/2024**  
**Farming in JESUS' Day**

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

***ONE AT ONE – Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, June 18 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for the wildfires in our land. Ask GOD's protection for those who fight these fires. Pray that personal property and natural resources are spared. And where it can be helpful, pray that these fires be productive.***

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This past Sunday, we heard two of JESUS' farm parables, "The Parable of the Growing Seed" and "The Parable of the Mustard Seed." Preceding those two parables from the farm is the "Parable of the Sower." We hear that tale during the year of Matthew which was last year. All of these parables about farming teach some important things about the Kingdom of GOD, but we don't fully grasp the significance of these stories as the people listening to JESUS did. It's because we don't understand how different farming was in the time of JESUS.

The Parable of the Sower tells of a farmer who goes out and seems to throw seeds about wildly. Some of the seed falls on the path. Some falls on rocky ground. Some falls among weeds. And some falls in good soil. We may find this farmer wasteful or a poor planter allowing the seed to fall in so many problematic areas. But this is how farming was done in Palestine in JESUS' day. The seed was scattered and then plowed under. So, though it fell on the path, the walkways trodden down by people cutting across the field, they would end up under the soil when the path was plowed. So also, for the seed landing where the ground contained chunks of limestone and the ground that had weeds. It would all be plowed burying the seed. Certainly, the limestone rocks would interfere with the growth of some of the seed and the weeds would come back to hinder others. This is how they did it and farmers knew the frustration of seed that landed in places where it would be more difficult to grow.

But there's more that we miss without fully understanding farming in that time and place. Most farmers in Palestine in the time of JESUS did not own their land. They were tenant farmers who hoped and prayed, first that their crop would grow and, second, that the harvest would be big enough to free them from their situation. A typical crop would yield a 7:1 return for the sown seed. A great year might return 10:1, a tenfold harvest. However, because a portion of the harvest had to be given to the wealthy landowner, and landowners always took enough of the harvest that the farmer remained indentured to him, farmers rarely achieved economic security and freedom.

It is to this situation that JESUS tells this parable, ending with the vision of an astounding harvest that returns thirty, sixty, or even a hundredfold return. Think what that would mean for an indentured farmer. What might he be able to purchase from the sale of such a tremendous crop? Think of what a harvest like that would bring to him.

Now JESUS is telling this parable about the Kingdom of GOD. It is not to say that, if you stick with GOD, you'll get this kind of harvest. Believe in GOD and you'll get rich. No, JESUS is saying that GOD knows what life is like. It's full of hard spots, rocks, and weeds. It's tough and it may seem there will be no escape. But the Kingdom of GOD offers something more. When we truly live into the Kingdom, burdens seem less. Hard times are easier to handle. Oppressive relationships can be overcome. And the blessings of GOD will be so great, you almost can't imagine.

More than this, JESUS says the seed is the word of GOD. When we go out to sow, to share the message of GOD's unconditional love for all people, not all of it will result in the harvest we might hope for. Some will fall on deaf ears. Some may seem interested for a time but then lapse into old ways. Some will become distracted by the things of this world and let the message slip away. But this is GOD's farm and the seeds we

sow will grow because of GOD. And the seeds that do take root will be blessed by GOD to grow in a person's life so that it is meaningful, and abundant, and life-changing. There is so much more to life with GOD, even when things are difficult. Despite what happens in this world, life in the Kingdom will be miraculous with blessings that bring meaning and hope, thirty, sixty, and even a hundredfold more than what we might even imagine.

In CHRIST's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey