

I worked for a company in Illinois years ago, working for a very entrepreneurial boss. Les was the president and he was a jogger. He would go out for a morning run, coming into the office in Glenview about nine or nine thirty in the morning all refreshed and energized with new ideas. Then the phone would ring in my office. *Brian, do you have a minute?* I would go downstairs to the sales department and into his office where often a few others would be gathered. We would be working on one project or another and Les would look at us and say *You know that project that we've been working on. Well... the more I think about it.* Then he would lay out another idea, another direction, another dimension, another proposal.

The more I think about it. Now this was code. It was a signal that we were about to head off in another entirely different direction. Hang on for the ride.

So this morning, this sermon, perhaps among others, is a The-more-I think- about-it sermon. In our Gospel lesson this morning, normally we think about the soil -- rocky soil, soil with thistles, good soil.

But this morning, the more I thought about it, I thought that perhaps we should go in a different direction. A sower went out to sow. What if this morning, we were the sower. What if you and I are the sowers. What seeds would we chose to take out of the bag slung around one of our shoulders. In many parts of the world and even today on small farms here in the U.S., sowers reach into a bag, take some seeds in their hands and sling these seeds out into the air. The seeds spread out and travel in a long arc before the sower before they fall onto the ground. And so imagine with me: What if we are the sowers following the ancient practice of sowing seeds? What if we have a practiced hand and scatter the seed before us? What if we walk in the midst of the open and expectant soil of life itself? What kind of seeds do we sow?

For a moment let us reach into the bag and bring up three different varieties of seeds that we might sow in the midst of our lives. Three different varieties of seeds among the many possibilities.

Hope

As sowers who go out to sow, let us first bring up seeds of hope. We live in a world and in a social climate where hope seems threatened. Anyone here can mention all sorts of things that might go wrong, are slipping away, or might change. So we should be about the task of being hopeful people. Not people with false optimism but people who have the capacity to create hope in the midst of troubled or anxious times. People who communicate a sense of inner strength that flows out of their conviction that God nevertheless is still working.

Wendell Berry has a wonderful short poem about sowing seeds of hope. Here is it from his collection: *Farming: A Handbook*. The poem is called simply *February 2, 1968*.

**In the dark of the moon, in flying snow, in the dead of winter
war spreading, families dying, the world in danger,
I walk the rocky hillside, sowing clover.**

In the face of darkness and in the midst of winter, to sow seeds is to engage in expectation. Hope. Dogged, persistent hope. In another poem, Berry also has written ...*the sower going forth to sow sets foot in a time to come....* This is what we do when we sow seeds and especially seeds of hope. We refuse to let the possibilities and the limitations of the present become the only reality. We look forward with courage and resolve. We summon up our faith in God. We sow seeds of hope.

Our first lesson this morning presents us with another man sowing seeds of hope. The prophet speaks to a people living in the dark of the moon, as Berry puts it, displaced refugees sensing that their world has collapsed, people needing hope in the midst of their dead spiritual winter. And the prophet boldly reaches into his sack and casts forth seeds of hope with words of hope that are remembered to this day:

10 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. 12 For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Let us both sow and receive seeds of hope.

But we will reach again into that burlap sack slung around our shoulders this morning and bring other another variety of seeds.

Gospel Seeds. Let us sow seeds that liberate new life.

Luther speaks of faith as a dynamic, something that awakens our inner spiritual being. Faith draws us into the life and the presence of God. Into relationship. Our reading from Romans this day speaks of this kind of seed that can liberate new life:

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ... 5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

This passage and many others ring with a spirit and a sense of liberation that comes from faith and from an encounter with God in Christ. If we can be set free, then we also can sow seeds that liberate. If we set our minds on the Spirit of God we can find in that very action and practice a way to life and peace.

Yesterday I received a letter. It came from someone who had long been active in one of our churches and she was enclosing a check for her pledge. Both on the check and in the letter she wrote: *I am sowing into the Gospel of Jesus Christ.* She went on to say *Greetings to everyone as we continue to do the works of our Lord Jesus Christ. Remain abundantly blessed.* Sowing into the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When we give money to the church, when we work together and give energy time and talent. When we pray and worship together. When we seek to express our concern for others and for the environment (this year through the environmental film project), when we do these things and more we are sowing into the Gospel of Jesus Christ, setting our minds on the things of the Spirit, living in new life. Gospel seeds.

But let's reach into the bag one more time. A sower went out to sow. Let us also sow seeds of wisdom.

Seeds of wisdom. The Bible is filled with wisdom literature in books such as Job and Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Wisdom teaching is found in Psalms. We find in at the end of Genesis in the story of Joseph. And now many scholars are emphasizing the presence of wisdom in the life and witness of Jesus. Jesus sowing seeds of wisdom.

If you have worked with your hands in various occupations at one time or another, you know the satisfaction that comes from a job well done. At the end of a job or task, either things work or they don't. You can see what you have done. But other jobs are not so defined. Teaching comes to mind. Here we are in the business of sowing seeds often without ever knowing the result.

Social work, counseling and pastoral roles are in the same vein. And so is parenting. Seeds are sown. The Christian life for all of us looms always as an opportunity to sow seeds of wisdom. Seeds -- like honesty, vulnerability, the ability to listen, the ability to bridge conflicts. Seeds of wisdom and wise living can be sown by our example. The ability to live with moderation. The ability to foster optimism and to look upon one's life with gratitude. The ability to express negative emotions without being destructive to others or to one's self. Seeds of wisdom.

And so a sower named Jesus went out to sow and we follow in that sower's path.

We, too, carry bags of seeds slung around our shoulders as we walk across the fields of life. Perhaps we do not realize this when we reach into the burlap sack and finger some seeds. We fling them out, casting them forth in a wide arc. Down they fall. They may be dormant for a while. Some for years. Some past the scope of our own lives. But then sometime in the future, in a memory, in a story told around the dinner table, in a quiet time of recollection, or in a moment of decision making -- the seeds that we have carried and selected, thrust themselves up into the light, and come alive.

May they be seeds of hope, seeds sown into the Gospel of Jesus Christ, seeds of wisdom; and may they bring new life.