

More than Luck

By John Blossom

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[PRAYER] What a joy it has been to settle into my life here at South Meriden Trinity! It has been so great to meet people, to get to see all of the possibilities for ministry that we have in this community, and to begin the discernment and planning for new and stronger ministries here. We have started to pray in the streets for the people who are the future of our church. We have started to open our doors of our sanctuary for prayer whenever I am here. These are simple and small steps, but they are signs that we can do more than we may think we can as children of God. This church, in this place, at this time, with you, its people, is filled with God's possibilities. This IS the day that the LORD has made...(let us rejoice and be glad in it!)

As we turn to our gospel and Old Testament lessons today, I think we can see that God understands very well what it takes to make God's possibilities happen in this world. You know, in today's world, we're easily tempted into thinking that "God's plan" is just another way of saying, "not my plan." And there's some truth in that - the things that we cannot control or that we didn't plan are often the ones that make us pause and think about something greater in our lives that's at work in the world. Things that are beyond our control, that challenge our limitations, are often the ones that ask us to understand who we are, in the middle of these challenges, in new ways. And truth be told, we don't always like "new!"

Yet, in spite of what a lot of people thought during the rise of machine making, God is not a great watchmaker, who has everything figured out, with history unfolding in a predetermined way, like the coil of a watch spring unwinding - you remember watch springs, maybe? No, the God of Christianity is a God of love, and Christian love requires the freedom to make the choice to love, the freedom to open our hearts to God's possibilities. When we first open our hearts to Jesus Christ as our savior, we are not just accepting God's plan for us - we're accepting that God's plan of love, in the image of Jesus Christ, will require us to make some challenging choices with our freedom. You see, faith is not a fact - faith is a choice, a choice to rely fully on God's possibilities, a choice that we make, moment by moment, throughout our lives.

It with the choices that we have as Christians in mind that we turn to Jesus' parable of the sower in Matthew's gospel. What could express God's possibilities more simply and more beautifully than a seed. Think of what a seed is all about. It seems like such a small and simple thing when we hold it in our hands. Like the word of God itself, there is a perfect plan for growth inside that seed, encoded in its genes, its DNA, an expression of all of God's possibilities for that plant, possibilities that developed from the dawn of life on this planet, evolving into the grace of God-given abundance and diversity, which we have on earth today.

But there is a difference between possibilities, and actualities. Not every seed will spring to life. And those that do come to life may or may not grow in the best of places. And those that grow in good places may not have the right conditions to grow well. It is only those seeds with the right conditions in the right places that begin to prosper, and spread their own seeds generously and widely around them. If your backyard is like my backyard this summer, you know that God has been very good to seeds this year!

Jesus's parable of the sower makes this clear enough on one level. The seed is like God's word, sown in our hearts, our spiritual DNA that transforms us from mere human beings into children of God, ready to grow and thrive in God's image. But who is the sower? And what do we make of the rocks, the shallow soil, the weeds, and the good soil? Are these just places where God the sower just happens to throw us in life, a toss of the dice, an act of God's freedom to give us a hard life or an easy life? If you like the idea of a watchmaker God, then maybe that idea works for you. But I'd like us to look a bit beyond that, because, after all, we are Methodists, and so we are, by our nature, people who look at how much God wants us to love the world and ourselves as God loves us, a people seeking to be transformed, by the freedom that God has given us, to be part of Christ in this world.

You see, it seems that there is more than luck when it comes to becoming people of faith. It is not just a matter of an individual's personality, or their DNA, or where and when and how they happened to grow up, like Jacob being the second twin son of Isaac and Rebekah, by the luck of who was born first. Luck is saying that God has freedom, and we don't. But we do have freedom. We do have choices. We can choose to respond to the world as God responds, or not. And so, I would like to suggest to you, that, as God's church in Christ, we are all of these things, in this parable of Jesus - the seed, the sower, and the soil.

As God's church, we are God's seeds, born into Christ, through our baptism, with the perfect plan to love the world as God loves the world. As God's church, we are God's soil, the ones whose richness and depth in faith determines how well the seeds of faith that come into our church are able to grow - or not - and how we all endure hard times together. As God's church, we are God's sowers, responsible for harvesting the seeds of faith and spreading them where they will help God's kingdom on earth to prosper, sometimes taking the chance that unlikely places for growth might be the ones that God has prepared in ways that we cannot imagine.

We are God's seeds. We are God's soil. We are God's sowers. We have no choice about the seed of God's plan in us - God's plan lives in us, and we are to respond as God's church to fulfill it. But what we do with that plan is more than luck. When we greet a person in our community, our families, or someone in our church, how are we greeting the seed of God's plan in them? Do we offer God's plan in them a rocky place, hard and unforgiving? Do we offer God's plan in them shallow soil, a willingness to go just so far as God's people of faith, but then show them the rock untouched by faith that lies within us? Do we offer God's plan in them spiritually rich soil, but choke out their growth with the weeds of destructiveness

that grow in us, because we have let sin take root in the soil of our hearts? Or do we, as Jesus hopes for in his parable, offer God's plan in them the soil in God's church that is pure, and rich, and wholesome, and deep, and well cared-for, so that faith can grow in others and in us beyond our wildest imaginings, and lead to an abundance of the fruits of faith, fruits that far exceed the world's imaginings?

The truth is that every person in every church is a combination of rocks, shallows, weeds, and good soil. Yet every person, in every church, has a choice to change who we are as people in Christ, to change what's in the spiritual garden of our hearts, and to mind how it grows. God's plan is sown in our hearts, and it will not let go of us, if we allow God's plan to cling to our hearts, and allow God to guide its growth. Every person, in every church, has the potential to be a sower of God's word for Christ, if we know what is the good seed to be harvested and sown from our faith, and take chances on what God considers good people for faith to grow in. After all, God took a chance on us.

The seed. The soil. The sower. You are all of these. Our church is all of these. And we all have choices about how rich the soil of faith is in our hearts, how carefully we pull out and throw away the rocks that pop up in it, how well we mind the weeds of the world's distractions and corruptions that creep in over time, and how willing we are to use the fruits of our faith to make new gardens in new hearts, here, in this place, and around the world.

We cannot do this alone. We need one another to be willing to do this gardening together. Faith is not luck. Faith is a choice, a choice that requires us to choose people who we may not always like, but who God knows are people who we need to love, and be loved by, to grow and deepen our faith, for our sake, and for the sake of God's world.

This is the church of God's possibilities. This is South Meriden Trinity United Methodist Church, a church that has endured, and often thrived, not because of luck, but because of generations of Christians who chose to deepen their lives of faith, and to share it with others. Receive God's seed with joy. Deepen and purify its soil with God's love. Spread the bounty of its growth with God's hope. This is our life. This is our promise. This is our possibility. Amen.