

A prophets task is to reveal the fault lines hidden beneath the comfortable surface of the worlds we invent for ourselves, the national myths as well as the little lies and delusions of control and security that get us through the day.

Kathleen Norris

Be very careful how you live then, not as unwise but as wise.

St Paul to the Ephesians

THE PARABLE OF
THE SOILS

¹ That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

¹⁰ The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

¹¹ He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹²Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables:

“Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

¹⁵ For this people’s heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.’

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and
your ears because they hear.

¹⁷ For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Matthew 13 vs. 1-23

A SECRET ABOUT
THE KINGDOM OF GOD

it comes by hearing . . .

¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Romans 10

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

1 Corinthians 3

HOW DO WE RESPOND
TO WHAT WE HEAR?

THE FIRST SOIL : HARD

When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.

C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

THE SECOND SOIL : **SHALLOW**

The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

Scripture and tradition tell us that formation into the likeness of Christ, also known as spiritual maturity, is not achieved by always getting what we want. It is not a product of seeking immediate gratification. The apostle Paul compares his pursuit of Christ to competing in a race. It's a focused effort of "self-control" and "discipline." And Peter calls us to supplement our faith with "self-control," "steadfastness," and to do this with diligence. Traditionally, the Christian life has been marked by releasing one's desires, submitting to a spiritual mentor or community, and learning to take up the cross and deny oneself.

Shepherds guided believers through formative and corrective disciplines—most being activities we would never choose to engage in if left to our desires. These values are not championed in our consumer culture, and they certainly don't prove popular among church shoppers seeking a comfortable religious experience. But surrendering control and embracing self-denial ensured that believers received what they needed to mature in Christ, not simply what they wanted.

Skye Jethani

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3

I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew
a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to
make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't
recommend Christianity.

C.S. Lewis

THE THIRD SOIL : **CROWDED**

The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

WORRIES OF THIS LIFE

One of the most obvious characteristics of our daily lives is that we are busy. We experience our days as filled with things to do, people to meet, projects to finish, letters to write, calls to make, and appointments to keep. Our lives often seem like over-packed suitcases bursting at the seams. In fact, we are almost always aware of being behind schedule. There is a nagging sense that there are unfinished tasks, unfulfilled promises, unrealized proposals. There is always something that we should have remembered, done, or said. There are always people we did not speak to, write to, or visit. Thus, although we are very busy, we have a lingering feeling of never really fulfilling our obligations.

Beneath our worrying lives, however, something else is going on. While our minds and hearts are filled with many things, and we wonder how we can live up to the expectations imposed upon us by ourselves and others, we have a deep sense of unfulfillment. While busy with, and worried about many things, we seldom feel truly satisfied, at peace, at home. A gnawing sense of being unfulfilled underlies our busy lives.

The great paradox of our time is that many of us are busy and bored at the same time. While running from one event to the next, we wonder in our innermost selves if anything is really happening. While we can hardly keep up with our many tasks and obligations, we are not so sure that it would make any difference if we did nothing at all. While people keep pushing us in all directions, we doubt if anyone really cares. In short, while our lives are full, we are unfulfilled.

Henri Nouwen

DECEITFULNESS OF WEALTH

Western culture today is so powerful and alluring that it often swallows us whole. Its beauty, power, and promise generally take away both our breath and our perspective. The lure of present salvation—money, sex, creativity, the good life—has, for the most part, entertained, amused, distracted, and numbed us into a state where we no longer have a perspective beyond that of our culture and its short-range soteriology.

Where talk and concern centers around money, food, entertainment, sports, sex, and health, there is little sense that the earth is ablaze with the fire of God, and even less of a sense that one should have his shoes off before it. In our normal consciousness, whenever we approach God, even in formal prayer and in our churches, it is with very measured expectations. The God who is met in the measured expectations of our own desires and imagination dies in his own impotence and irrelevance.

Ronald Rolheiser

CHOKING & UNFRUITFUL

THE FOURTH SOIL :
RADICALLY
FRUITFUL

But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1 vs. 3-11

THE PARABLE OF
THE SOILS