

BIBLE BACKGROUND: JESUS' PARABLE OF THE SOWER (MARK 4:1-9)

BEHIND THE SCENES: About the Parable of the Sower

Jesus told parables to teach people about God's loving reign and to turn people's hearts toward God. Parables are simple stories that often have a surprising twist. People were familiar with the agricultural themes Jesus spoke of because farming was a common practice everyone depended on. Farming businesses and families don't survive unless the sower is good. A common sowing practice was to walk along with a bag of seeds, take a handful, swing an arm's arc, and throw the seed across a swath of ground. A yield of 10-15 times the seed sown would be good; today growers might expect a yield of 40 times or more. Farming is always a risk. No matter what you do, the crop doesn't always come in. Soil quality, rocks, weeds, birds, and sunlight are all important variables. But don't expect the comparisons Jesus makes to match neatly. Parables aren't tidy. They make you think and invite you to listen.

THE BIGGER PICTURE: What Christians Say

Jesus compares the seed that is sown to the word that is spoken. This "word of God" can mean several things. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate through whom all Creation was created (Genesis 1, John 1) and is re-created in his life, death, and resurrection. The Bible is also the Word of God because Scripture reveals Jesus Christ and because God's Spirit speaks to us through Scripture. When we proclaim the good news about Jesus Christ, that is the Word of God too. Farming is a good image for exploring how God's Word grows in the world. We share in proclaiming God's Word, but we cannot control who hears it or how the Word works in those who hear it, and it may work in us in ways we don't expect.

ECOLOGY AND CHRISTIANITY: Making the Connection

It's true that this parable is not speaking directly to 21st-century environmental concerns, but this passage is asking us to listen deeply to Jesus as he shares God's dream of reconciliation for the whole world. The beginning of Genesis tells us two important things: 1. All of Creation is good and loved by God; 2. The Creation God made and loves is given to us to care for. Following Jesus means showing love—not only to our neighbors and not only to our enemies—but to all of God's Creation: plants and forests, rivers and ocean, air and earth, animals and people. In this way, God is graciously inviting us to be co-creators in the renewing of the earth.

THE MAIN IDEA: In a Nutshell

It's important for us to listen to Jesus' stories because that's how God's love, the gospel, is planted within us. When God's love takes root and grows up within us we have more than enough love to face hard challenges and share with others, including God's creation.