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### **Your soul, the good soil.**

"Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

Matthew 13, 8-9

My Dear Brethren,

During our childhood years it frequently happened that our parents were calling us, but we didn't hear it, or didn't want to hear it. Our parents then admonished us: "So, are you sitting on your ears?". As children normally do, we were exasperated, our parents are mocking us; how could anyone sit on their ears?

Now that we have grown up, and our teenagers disregard us, much as we disregarded our parents. Now it's us who speak those words of admonishment: Son, are you sitting on your ears? Can't you hear me, or just don't want to hear me?

Jesus of Nazareth spoke words of a more sophisticated admonishment when, after the parable of the sower, he called upon his audience: Let anyone with ears listen. We can ask: why did he say that? Were there hearing-impaired people in the audience? No, there weren't any. My brethren. The purpose of Jesus was to call on people not just to hear his words, but that they understand them as well. And not just to understand them, but that they open their hearts to them. Jesus told the parable of the sower, so people can recognize themselves in it. The full story goes like this: the sower does into the field; before the days of tractors and planting machinery there were few tools for sowing: a man, a sack full of seeds, and the prepared field. The sack was tied across the shoulder of the sower, so the baggy part with the seeds was in front, and from the sack the sower dispersed the seeds with a sweeping sideways move of his hand. I would imagine that our older brethren still remember that era when the sowing of the wheat and other grains was done like that. Planting of vegetables follows the same process, just the covered area is different. I'm still amazed when large vegetable plants grow from such a tiny seed of a carrot or a parsley. Indeed, what a miracle that is.

In the parable the sower is expertly spreading the seed, but the outcome will differ for each handful of seed.

Because some seeds will fall on the side of the road where hungry birds will gobble them up. No crop will grow from that.

Some seeds will fall onto rock-strewn soil, the wheat will germinate and grow some, but during the arid weeks of summer it will dry out, because the roots won't absorb enough nutrients due to the rocks around them. No crop will grow from that.

Some seeds will fall among the thistles and weeds where the grain may germinate and grow some, but with passing time the weeds crowd out and suffocate the grain. No crop will grow from that.

Then, there are those seeds that fall on the good soil, and yield a crop thirty-fold, sixty-fold, hundred-fold. What a crop! Let anyone with ears listen.

The disciples hear the parable, but they don't understand it. They honestly admit that they don't understand why Jesus is talking about sowing seeds, and about the seeds that yield a crop, and about the seeds that don't.

Jesus answered this way: the sower is God's messenger, a servant of God. The seed is God's words and statutes. The soil is the human soul.

At all times God has been sending His sowers, those people who proclaim His statutes that people ought to love life, ought to accept with humility their creation, ought to honor life, and to love God, their neighbor, and themselves. However, people respond in different manner to God's words and statutes.

There are the "I couldn't care less" type of people who have no regards for God or for other people. Their words and actions betray that they consider themselves as God, as almighty, and come hell or high water, they act on behalf of their own interest, even if in the process they trample others, exploit others, or impoverish others. They are unwilling to hear God's words, the words of the Scriptures roll off of them, and prayer doesn't reach their souls.

If there is a crop from their lives, they would live it up themselves, and exclude everyone else from it.

There are people with rocky, hardened soul, with a heart of stone, or with a withered soul that haven't found its nourishment, their sustaining moisture, their life blood. Perhaps, they suffered so many disappointments, so much grief that they don't have the energy to be happy. They listen to sermons about God, their flame of ambition to become a better person is still flickering, but they have no perseverance, and they give up the fight before long. They have a stoic view of the world, and the roots of their souls don't quite reach the nourishing soil of God's love.

There are unbalanced individuals, turning whichever way the wind blows; they are unable to decide which way to go, what kind of principles to follow in their lives. They always ask the opinions of others, because they can't form an opinion of their own, and even if they form an opinion, they can't commit to it. These people always ask others

about what they should be doing, what decision they should be making. They believe that someone else should determine how they behave, what friends they should choose, which schools they should attend, who might they trust, who should they blame, who should they avoid, who should they choose for a spouse. They do all this to escape the responsibility for their acts, so they can fault someone else if their lives don't turn out well. They are like the ground full of thistle and weeds; everyone around them influences them, and at the end they might be taken advantage of. They are cut off from the nourishing soil of God's love; they listen to everybody, but not to the almighty God.

Finally, there are those people, according to this teaching of Jesus, whose soul is like the good soil. They hear the words of God; they listen to the messengers of God; they follow the laws and statutes of God. Their lives are predicated on kindness, understanding, and unselfishness. Because of that they themselves and the people around them derive enjoyment from them, and produce a crop.

My Brethren, the obvious question surfaces: to which group do I belong? Which soil does my soul resemble? What kind of crop will I grow? What kind of fruit will I produce? What is my soul like? Can I allow anyone, God, ideas, people, to come within an earshot of me? Or, am I like the side of the road where the birds of indifference and negligence gobble up the seeds intended for the good soil? Is my soul stoic? Is my soul unstable and restless? Or, is my soul a good soil?

My Brethren, before my questions completely scatter your thoughts, I want to share with you that my life experience tells me that the types of souls Jesus mentioned in the parable of sower are not categories of people. No way. There is no person with a strictly neglectful soul, with rock hard soul, with thorny soul, or with a soul of good soil. Rather, these descriptions from Jesus indicate that those types of souls, the different ways we relate to life, are inside of each of us. We can't categorically say that the soul of one person is always indifferent, or always stoic, or always hiding from life's responsibilities, or even always representing good soil. What I'm saying is, and I hope you agree with me, that all these manifestations of souls are present in each of us, and our faith in God determines which manifestation is amplified inside us.

Who among us couldn't point to a time in our lives when we were running circles around ourselves, like a dog chasing its tail, not realizing the pathetic situation?

Who among us couldn't point to a time in our lives when we were stoic? The times when we couldn't find joy in anything or anybody?

Who among us couldn't point to a time in our lives when we couldn't make a decision about our own lives, and then, after experiencing unhappiness, we reflected the responsibility somewhere else, and pointed a finger at someone else?

And who among us couldn't point to time in our lives when we felt that our soul was the good soil. We were surrounded by calmness, peace, satisfaction, and love; our days were full of love and joy.

Yes, my Brethren, all of that is inside us. We steer our lives between joys and sufferings, between faithfulness and disbelief, just like an acrobat on the high wire. Our safety harness is our belief in God. If we happen to plunge into the deep chasm of suffering and disbelief, God will lift us out of that, and put us back onto the high wire, so we can accomplish the next great performance of our life.

I fully believe, my Brethren, that all of us faithful believers are God's sowers. Each believer is called is called to sow the seeds, if no place else, within their families. In our families we ought to educate our children about the teachings of Jesus primarily by role modeling. The sowers in a family are the parents who conduct their lives, talk, work, make decisions in a manner that demonstrates to the children the values important to the parents. Values such as the respect for human dignity, mutual understanding, unselfishly helping others, loving the life filled with faith.

We are all called by God to be sowers. As we have our individual differences, God commands us to act in different areas of life. This means that ministers and teachers are called to be sowers for the entire community in addition to be a sower for their families. Naturally, the community accepts only the authentic sowers. The ones who convincingly demonstrated that they conduct their lives in a manner that corresponds their teachings.

I have for a long time been preparing to be a sower. I spent a lot of time with my father who was a minister. The church always appealed to me; praying brought me joy. I have observed just how magnificent it is to be a sower, to encourage people to recall their innocent, pure soul of their childhood, and to find again that soul of good soil. I saw that the difficulties of life, the personal losses, the disappointments can make the people's soul indifferent. I saw that the absence of love results in the loss of self-confidence, and how the soul then becomes ragged once people distance themselves from the sustaining power of love. On the other hand, I also saw that people with the soul of the good soil can live in an earthly paradise; they can live each day like they are in heaven. It's good to be a sower; I wanted to be one too.

However, a sudden tragedy disrupted my life; without any warning death came to our doorstep. I was shocked. My soul felt hollowed out. My heart and soul hardened, kindness evaporated from me, only anger, rage and envy remained. Why was it my father who had to die? Why he? I envied anyone who's father was still alive. I wanted to be God's sower no more.

But then, after the sudden arrival of the bad news, just as suddenly good news came my way. In my dream one night I saw my father approaching and opening the door of our house, and with great spontaneity he stopped at the table and smiled at us, and said: "You are on the right path; stay on it and keep going". And he left as quickly as he

arrived. I was taken over by such an incredible calmness I never could dream about before. I began to sense the eternal nature of the soul. I began to sense that those who are no longer with us in our mortal world, are still with us as a soul. He didn't abandon us after all. All my anger disappeared. My soul was liberated from its lethargy, my rage was gone. I could love my life again, and myself in it, and those people whose fathers were still alive.

My Brethren. I told you my story, because I'm certain that you've had similar experiences. You, too, understand our soul of good soil may harden and get weedy once sadness and suffering overtakes it. I also hope that we move onto the path of healing when we share the troubles of our souls, as opposed to when we build a high wall of anger, self-pity and hopelessness around us.

I do believe that we all are called to be sowers, even if at times we can't live up to the task. It is important that we recognize it, and even more important that our faith in God, like a flame from a lamp, remain deep in our soul, so that we never completely turn away from God.

Let us watch over our own souls; check on it with love. Let us protect and nurture our soul, so it won't be terminally damaged by the big trials of life. Our souls were created to be the good soil of God where the crop is the joy of our life. Let us strive for producing a good crop; let us produce the treasures of our souls such as kindness, loyalty, understanding, and perseverance.

Let us not only hear but understand the laws and statutes of God. Let us not sit on our ears when the Scripture is speaking to us. Let us invite into our hearts the essence of our faith: the love of God, of human beings, and of life. Let us never be discouraged, as the faithful can always have hope that the bad days and the times of ill fortune are waning. We place our trust into God, that after a possibly rocky, weed-filled period of our soul we may attain that our soul and our life yet again becomes good soil.

Allow your soul to produce its fruits. Accept God's help in making your soul into the good soil. Amen.