

Introduction:

The series is called *The Stories that Sustain Us*. When Leah asked me to take a Sunday to speak in this series, I thought it might be a difficult task. And it was. You see, I have spent the last year in, what I call, a deconstruction crisis. About this time last year I came to this realization that maybe everything I ever learned about God was not all true because it was taught through the white male patriarchal framework. I won't go into all the details but to be honest it has been really difficult and there were days when I just wanted to burn it all down and walk away. But I am still here. Over this past year I have been doing so much soul searching, seeking, learning, trying to find grounding again by reading, studying, and going to seminars. I am in this. I am trying to be faithful to this journey, no matter how hard it gets, and hopefully that is enough, at least for now.

So as I was thinking about this series, I found myself asking what is compelling about the Jesus story, what makes it worth it, what is it that keeps calling me forth, what is it that keeps me here? Hopefully, through this series you have been asking yourself those same questions. It isn't an easy task to wrestle with these questions though.

So what is compelling about the Jesus story?

- I love that He was a great prophet, teacher, rabbi.
- I marvel at how His teaching was so subversive.
- I am moved that Jesus cared for the marginalized and the oppressed.
- He was and is an amazing example to all to fight for the oppressed and the injustices of this world.
- The list can go on because there is so much about Jesus' life that draws people to him.

But as I reflected on this question, I sensed that there has to be more. As I peeled back the layers of this question, I found this...

The part of the Jesus story that sustains me:

- Is the life changing transformation that happens when there is an encounter with Jesus or the divine.

- The life transformation that happens when you allow these stories to change you from the inside out, that place when the stories go from a head knowledge to a heart knowledge that is undeniably sacred and spiritual.
- The mystical, unexplainable, part of the Jesus story where there are no words that can adequately describe the encounter.

Yes, he was a great teacher, world disrupter, our example to fight social justice, but the way he went about it was touching and transforming the lives of the people he encountered.

That is what keeps me here. That is what keeps drawing me in.

And this morning, that is the part of the Jesus story that I would like to share with you all. We will do this through a parable.

Dena Read the parable - It is titled the Parable of the Sower

Let the words of this parable rest on your hearts this morning.

I picked this parable because

- This is a familiar story that I grew up with yet it spoke to me in new ways as I was reading it.
- I wanted us to look at this story because Jesus is a master storyteller and He told about the mystery of the divine through parables/metaphors.
- I love the hidden messages and spiritual meaning behind the parables. It is a great example of how we can find spirituality in all things and in ways that we can relate the unexplainable mysteries of God to others. One of my favorite exercises that I did with the youth was to find an object and everyone had to come up with a spiritual metaphor.
- His parables taught of spiritual realities with earthly analogies.

The Parable that Dena just read is known as the Parable of the Sower

- As I began studying this parable I realized that there actually could have been a better title -
- How about The Parable of the seed because it was about seed growing in different places.

- Or the Parable of the soil. Where we learn that good soil is where things grow.

This is what I want to focus on today. Good soil. What makes good soil?

Do you know the difference between good soil and dirt? Actually, some of you all probably know more about dirt and soil than I do. I have never grown a garden successfully.

Soil is alive. Dirt is dead. If you go to the Exploratorium in SF there is a compost exhibit about good soil. The exhibit shows how active and alive the soil is by the heat it produces. You put your hand in a glove and reach down into the soil and the deeper you reach your hand the warmer it gets.

Jeff Kach - Rodale Institute said that There are 9 billion micro-organisms in a **teaspoon** of healthy soil. We only know about 10% of what is going on at a microscopic level. Soil is the most complex ecosystem on the planet.

But here is the thing, we have degraded about half of the earth's topsoil in the last 150 years. Some scientists say that if we keep farming the way we do at this rate we only have about 60 growing seasons left and a growing season is a year. So that means 60 years. Kind of scary.

At the Rodale Institute they are teaching farmers a new way to farm that will not deplete the soil. A farming method that will be sustainable into the future. The term organic came from the founder of Rodale Institute. He believed that.

Healthy soil = healthy food = healthy people

In our parable there are four types of soil of where the seed landed.

- Seed fell along the path where birds came and ate it up
- Rocky places; the seed grew but there wasn't enough soil so it couldn't take root and died
- And there were seeds that fell among the thorns where the weeds choked out the plant so it couldn't produce grain
- And then there was good soil. Where the seed could take root and grow and produce a plentiful crop.

This parable is one that Jesus gives an explanation, not to everyone but to his disciples.

The Seed, he says, is the word. The word meaning God. The greek philosophers would use this word, logos, word, and it wasn't just a christian term. They described it as an active rational and spiritual principle that permeated all reality. They called the logos providence, nature, god, and the soul of the universe. So when we read this in Mark the people listening are coming from that understanding. The seed is the word, the unexplainable mysteries and essence of the divine that is in all things.

And the different types of soil is the place where people's hearts/souls can be receptive to the divine. In the parable there are different places the seed was dropped, but one place where the seed took root and grew. Good soil.

If this seed, the word, God is permeating the world in nature, people, stories, songs, poetry, art, children, relationships, then he/she/they, the divine is everywhere and actively interacting with humanity.

Do we always see those moments? Are we too busy, distracted by the cares of the world to slow down and notice those divine moments. As we cultivate good soil, or live in good soil we will find those sacred moments and name them.

I want to take a moment for us to think about those places where we have experienced the divine. Those moments where we sense and know God's presence.

In one or two words how would you say you or have experienced the divine? Throw your response in the chat.

That's good soil. Everything that was listed.

I think the good soil is when our hearts are most receptive, most attuned, most open to experience the divine.

I want to give an example of an analogy of this parable.(I told you I like parables and try and find spiritual meaning in all things)

This year I am back in the classroom teaching math. I love it. The students amaze me at the way they solve equations and how they see problems. Each student is unique and wonderfully created by God. and I try and

But let me tell you about the categories of Math students that I teach: Here are a few...

- There are those students who just want to get things done. They say just tell me the formula. They want to learn but they want to take the short cuts.
- There are those students that say I don't get it. So I will explain it to them And they say they get it. So I implore them to write it down but they say they have it in their head. Until they get home and try to do the homework, but they forget how to do the math.
- There are those who literally try to hide or push their work aside. They don't care. They don't want to do the work at all. Or Maybe it is too hard, maybe they are too tired, maybe they don't believe they are good at math.
- There are those who don't want to be taught because "They get it". They want to zip through the math lessons without writing anything down but the answers.
- Then there is the disciplined student. They know math is hard, but they ask questions. When they make a mistake they go back and figure where they messed up. They don't want the short cuts, they want to understand it. They don't do everything perfectly, but they are engaged in learning it well.

That is like good soil. They aren't the perfect students who get straight A's but they are Receptive to learning. They have a Desire to grow. They are Willing to put in the hard work. And they have a drive in them to seek out truth.

Good soil.

And spiritually speaking,

We know we are in that place of good soil when our hearts are Receptive to learning. When we have a Desire to grow. When we are Willing to put in the hard work. When we seek out truth. And when we see truth, the divine, we name it.

The season we are in is pretty tough and exhausting, and some of us even say “survival mode.” I get that.

So here is where I ask you to use your spiritual imagination:

If we approach the idea that we can live from the place of good soil, no matter how difficult things are then we can still grow. And I don't mean the quick growth, I mean the slow, sometimes painful learning and unlearning from the divine. My hope is that we can learn to lean into the idea that the divine is in all things and is calling us to see and experience those divine moments.

I believe the seed that is planted in our lives is the divine, God, making themselves known to us. Through all the ways you mentioned earlier in the chat.

Good soil - That place where our hearts are receptive to see the divine, to hear, the divine, to experience the divine and to be changed, transformed. It is not always easy, fast, complete, or clear. But it is that place of perpetual learning.

God is working in our lives. All around us. Do you see, Do you notice?

As our hearts are receptive to God's love, we become more loving.

As our hearts are receptive to God's joy, we become more joyful.

As our hearts are receptive to God's hope, we become more hopeful.

And I believe what we are building here at Haven is good, good soil where each of us can be planted and rooted and grow in God's love, joy, and hope. Do you see it? God desires all of us to know and experience their love. Individually, uniquely bringing the beautiful divinity in each of us to make a beautiful garden. We don't have to have it all figured out. We just need to have an open receptive posture to all that God wants to teach us.

My hope and prayer for you is that you can experience the divine and be changed by the encounter in unexplainable ways.

Let's pray.

Before we go to breakout groups I want to give you a moment to reflect on where you are in this journey of faith. Sometimes, no, a lot of times it is difficult to find words to articulate matters of faith, so I want to lead us in a contemplative exercise that will help us. Leah has created a slide with several pictures on it. I took these pictures out at Point Pinole and the many paths that are there. I want you to look at the different pictures. Slowly and carefully look at each one. What picture resonates with where you are in your relationship with God or where you are on your faith journey? Which one depicts how you are sensing or seeing things at this moment? Let this be a moment when you let God speak to you through these pictures.

We will take a few minutes of contemplation over these pictures.