

How to deal with rejection

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A public figure says something that gets them in trouble. Next day they tell us that their words were taken out of context. Often, they're right. In a media world of ten-second sound grabs, a few words without context can easily be replayed in a way that gives exactly the opposite message. We need to remember that when we study scripture; context is always important if we want to understand its true message.

At first glance, the parable of the sower seems to be a self-contained story with a straightforward message. God or Jesus scatters the seeds of the Kingdom – words of truth which can take root in our hearts and minds – and under the right conditions, these words produce abundant life. The parable seems to challenge us to ask if our hearts and minds are soil worthy of the seeds Jesus plants. Am I like those unproductive places: the path, compacted hard by the passing of many feet; the rocky ground, where no scattered seed will survive; the thorny ground where there's too much competition? Or, like the good soil, could my life nourish others?

They're good questions for us to ask. But these questions come from our context where we're battered daily by questions of productivity. Do workers really earn their wages? Do people on welfare really deserve the support they receive? But this parable has its own context. It's more than a parable about different soil qualities or efficient farming practices. We find this out when we look at the parable's own context. The chapters leading up to this parable describe what happens earlier on the same day. Jesus' ministry is joyfully welcomed by some people but bitterly opposed and rejected by others who traps to catch him out. And then there were his disciples

being trained for a life of ministry in this conflicted context. The Parable of the Sower is Jesus' way to help his followers deal with rejection; not to be discouraged by it. Can you see the difference between our contextual reading and this one? We, of the productivity generation read it as a sort of judgement or warning; we think it's sorting us into good and bad soils.

But in Matthew's Gospel setting, we followers of Jesus can hear it as training in dealing with real dangers; not hypothetical worries. Jesus faced rejection on a daily basis; but that doesn't mean God wasn't active in his ministry*. The Church community who gave us this Gospel also faced rejection on a daily basis*. And Christians today still face this sort of vehement rejection and criticism*. In this parable, Jesus provides a way to help us understand and weather rejection.

The mixed crowd that day by the lake embody the soils the parable names. Some hear and receive the gift, but they can't share it. Why did Jesus bother teaching them anything? Others lie in wait to snatch the teaching away before it can show its potential for blessing. Why on earth teach them? Then there are the people who handed it all down to us. Aha – that's why.

So what can we learn? Some people are struck by how wasteful the sower is. That's exactly what Jesus was doing that day at Lake Galilee. He taught indiscriminately: there were people who wouldn't receive his teaching, but he taught regardless.

We – the productivity generation – need to forget our way of reading this parable. If we *could* proclaim Jesus, but we hold back because we think our listeners won't be able to receive it productively, we should think again. That's giving in to discouragement. Jesus told *everyone*. Some people rejected his teaching. He knew they would; but that didn't stop him. And he teaches us to be like him. And why wouldn't we; we can look back at the countless harvest over the centuries and only wonder at God's power to transform.

And that's the final message of this parable – for today at least. The power to transform life – to give life; to bring life into being – the power is in the seed, *not* in our judgement of how it will be received. The sower in this parable scatters the grain extravagantly; as though it will never run out. And it's true; it never will run out. The power for its germination lies with God; not with us. Ours is but to sow the seed; God will call forth its life; God always has. Amen