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Four Paths But One Option Only

Då nu mycket folk kom tillhoppa, i det att inbyggarna i de särskilda städerna begåvo sig ut till honom, sade han i en liknelse: »En såningsman gick ut för att så sin säd. Och när han sådde, föll somt vid vägen och blev nedtrampat, och himmelens fåglar åto upp det. Och somt föll på stengrund, och när det hade vuxit upp, torkade det bort, eftersom det icke där hade någon fuktighet. Och somt föll bland törnen, och törnerna växte upp tillsammans därmed och förkvävde det. Men somt föll i god jord, och när det hade vuxit upp, bar det hundrafaldig frukt.» Sedan han hade talat detta, sade han med hög röst: »Den som har öron till att höra, han höre.»

Lukasevangeliet 8, 4-8

Jesus is telling a parable. Not a story that happened in real life. Though it could have happened...

In the English class at school we would say here: it is an allegory. What it tells is not what it means. It serves as an illustration. The parable of the fourfold field, as it has become known, does not explain agriculture.

But what then? Later even the disciples would ask Jesus, "And what does this mean?"

Jesus' parables challenged them, as they challenge us. We are forced to reflect. What is Jesus trying to say? And then it goes one important step further: What is he trying to say to me personally? So it would be good to become silent over a parable and listen into it, reflect, meditate.

People do not like this necessarily. When today in our country people like to hold the Bible against the Koran with the aim of saying that the Bible is just as outdated - and cruel - as the Koran, and when a biblical passage is then named or reference is made to certain biblical books, then this is wrong from its beginning: People are not listening to the biblical text. (Nor do they really prove what the Koran is saying.)

Because the Bible is not a book that you can just read off. It is not a collection of rules of conduct that you have to follow and then you are pleasing to God. Yes, it is not exactly that in the first place. Because it doesn't say: Do everything I say and you will go to heaven and see God. It says: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". It says: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him."(Ev. of John 3:16 and 17) This is something completely different. We don't labour to get into heaven. Heaven is a gift by God through Jesus.

The Bible is so much, it is so rich. It contains history which can be read like a book. It contains poems, rules of life, theological interpretations and explanations, exhortations. (Most of this the Koran does not have.) It tells of the past, of the present at the time of Jesus, of the future, which aims at the end of the world and the return of Jesus. The Bible is so much. But it is always one thing: the book through which God wants to speak to you, wants to make you think. To call you to faith, or to call you to live in faith. One thing it never is: a book of dull, unfounded commands that call you into blind obedience.

But now: the parable.

In almost every verse Jesus talks about the seed.

Seeds - well, that's hardly our world anymore. At least when we live in a real big city.

A friend told me about one of his tenant who had bought a row of potted plants. At first, everything went well; the tenant was already proudly talking about his green fingers. But then the plants all died - wrong treatment, they don't like it. The fingers were not that green after all.

Some people still know about potted flowers. But a seed? What does a seed mean? A bag full of cucumber seeds 20 SEK and odds. What is that?

Three years ago we had sown cucumbers. Everything went well, the plants grew - until the snails came. One night - and everything was gone. Well, we didn't starve to death. It was simply a real pity.

But what if you have to live on it? If you sow out to harvest two sacks of grain - a little more than you need in a year, and then it doesn't rain enough or at the wrong time, and in the end you haven't even harvested a single sack of it. That's when you'll run out of bread! And in the course of the winter, comrade hunger sets in.

Hopefully you won't starve to death!

This is what happened to our ancestors, and they immediately understood how important it is for the seed to grow properly. This is what Jesus is talking about.

Hunger - and you don't know when there will be enough to eat again....The last time there was great hunger for everyone was in Germany after the Second World War (and Sweden helped hungry German innocent children, and I still remember this with gratitude). For most of us here, this is history, we have never experienced it....

But what is the seed in the parable? What do we need to live? It is not only material things. If that were all, we wouldn't be sitting here either! Because here there is neither free beer nor other material things as a gift.

Think of a piece of paper, write on it what you still need: security, love, comfort; beautiful fulfilling moments: a piece of music, a picture, the view of nature; peace in your heart, that the ugliness will be taken out of your life and all will be well...

Are these components of the seed that is to bear fruit?

Jesus does not leave us in the dark, just as he did not leave the disciples in the dark. He explains his parable immediately. It is too important.

"His disciples asked him what this parable meant. And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but unto others it is given in parables, that they should see, and see not, and hear, and understand not."

Hearing and not understanding. But still want to understand! Until one has become a disciple and understands more and more.

"But this is the parable: The seed is the word of God." And here I have to interrupt again.

The Word of God - in Greek it is not the spoken word. In the Greek there is a term, the same as in the first chapter of the Gospel of John.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word. The same was in the beginning with God. ... In him was life, and the life was the light of men."

The term Word - ὁ λόγος (ho logos) - means here: the Christ, his message, his mission. What he is and what that means. For you.

"The seed is the Word of God" therefore means "The seed is Christ in your life."

Thus prepared, knowing,

that what Jesus tells is not an event, but a parable that has the greatest significance for your life, knowing that the dying seed means hunger, and hunger leads to starvation which means death, that the seed is Christ in your life.

we hear Jesus' explanation quite differently.

Då frågade hans lärjungar honom vad denna liknelse betydde. Han sade: »Eder är givet att lära känna Guds rikets hemligheter, men åt de andra meddelas de i liknelser, för att de med seende ögon intet skola se och med hörande öron intet förstå'. Så är nu detta liknelsens mening: Säden är Guds ord. Och att den såddes vid vägen, det är sagt om dem som hava hört ordet, men sedan kommer djävulen och tager bort det ur deras hjärtan, för att de icke skola komma till tro och bliva frälsta. Och att den såddes på stengrunden det är sagt om dem, som när de få höra ordet, taga emot det med glädje, men icke hava någon rot; de tro allenast till en tid, och i frestelsens stund avfalla de. Och att den föll bland törnena, det är sagt om dem, som när de hava hört ordet, gå bort och låta sig förkvävas av rikedomens omsorger och njutandet av livets goda och så icke föra något fram till mognad. Men att den föll i den goda jorden, det är sagt om dem, som när de hava hört ordet, behålla det i rättsinniga och goda hjärtan och bära frukt i ståndaktighet.

Lukasevangeliet 8, 9-15

Four Paths But One Option Only.

Well, three times it will not work out with faith, with believing in Jesus. The first type of men, there are far too many of it. - Every church should be a sign of Christ. And Sweden has many beautiful churches... And some also go inside. And hear the word of the Holy Scriptures - whatever is then proclaimed. Luther gratefully recorded this: Even if some of the sermons he heard were rather pathetic - at every mass the Bible was read aloud, Bible words were prayed, just as today. Anyone who wants to may listen.

But there is a force that does not want that. That distracts. Yes, many a church building in the Roman Catholic church also refers to cases of abuse, etc. There is no need to list that here. But the Church of Jesus Christ is not defined by sins! At the centre is still what we have just heard:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. "

And how easily do people allow themselves to be distracted from this, though they may even have sung it at Christmas: The world was lost, Christ was born; Christ has appeared to make atonement for us...

By the way, the song "O, du fröhliche" continues saying: "The world lay in bondage, Christ is risen". A final stanza is, of course, missing, as the stanzas only reflect the main church festivals: "Coming again in glory, are you ready for it?"

The second time - the second path - is nowadays, when for example people are moved by the atmosphere in a church service, especially in these modern event services, which now also exist in Sweden, or in a performance of Christian music, such as Bach's "Matteuspassionen".

"You should read about it," they think, "ask about it. What did they sing? What does it mean? What was I touched by?" And it's already out of their heads on the way home. Or at the latest, when the seriousness of the daily routine begins. Yes, they think, they even confess it. But it's not in their lives. And if they don't let it in, if their life has the hardness of a rock towards Christ - and then?

But those on the rock are the ones: When they hear it, they receive the word with joy. But they have no root; for a time they believe, and in time of temptation they fall away.

And the third time - the third path -, that really speaks for itself: they do not bring their worries before God, but they argue with their worries against God.

Again and again, everything possible and impossible is more important than God. And thus their blessedness. It just doesn't seem clear to them.

In public life we meet this kind of people again and again. They publicly profess their Christian faith. But one feels so little of it: after all, they have to take care of their wealth, that is, of what they understand as the fullness of life.

But - as Jesus says - "... and bring no fruit to maturity." They let their career change them. And it is God who should change them, and not their career!

And this is already a question to ourselves. Do we let ourselves be changed by God or by whom or what?

But these in the good land are they that hear the word, and keep it in a fine good heart, and bring forth fruit in patience."

To ear the word, listening to Jesus Christ. Really listening. Over and over again. Keeping it: then attending to it. Growing in faith. In patience. It will bear fruit. The seed that falls on good land and receives sun and rain and the right warmth, it comes up, it bears fruit abundantly.

This only takes time. A whole summer for the grain, for the cucumbers, for the berries. In the life of faith, this usually means many years. And to most people a long life is given by God the grow and to bear fruit.

Keep Christ in a fine good heart. "Come, O my Saviour Jesus Christ, the door of my heart is open to you". We are used to singing that too. And hopefully we always mean it.

By the way, here you have a reason why we celebrate worship so "extendedly". Or so intensively:

How much remains from a service if we only hear one scripture reading, which is then preached on, if the sermon lasts 10 minutes only, if we shorten the service... We dearly need time, you and I, we need the time to silence the everyday noise and really listen to God's word until we can hear it.

And we also need time during the week. Soon Lent begins. That would be something: to take a little more time, at least until Easter, to hear the word of God, to hear Jesus Christ, and to keep it in a fine, good heart.

For example, by learning something by heart again. For example, the psalms that we pray during confession (from Psaltaren 103 and 139).

The English language is very precise here: to learn by heart. To learn with the heart. With the fine, good heart that God wants to give us. Amen.

f. Fred