

Gathering July 16, 2011
Reflection by Sr. Jeanette Homan, OSF

Last week, Jesus told a parable about a sower going out to sow seed and about the kind of soil the seed needs-rich soil being preferred. This week we have a story that emphasizes not the soil, but the seed-good seed.

We have some stories here in northeast Iowa about seeds-good seeds. The Seed Savers Exchange in Decorah, which preserves and shares heritage seeds, began when Diane Ott Whealy's grandfather gave her the seeds of two garden plants, Grandpa Ott's morning glory and German Pink tomato. These seeds had come from Bavaria with her great grandparents when they emigrated to St. Lucas, Iowa, in the 1870s. These heritage seeds and others added to the collection remain genetically unaltered, as they are planted, harvested, and either stored or replanted.

Iowa is also the home of Norman Borlaug, born near Cresco in 1914. As a forestry student who couldn't afford tuition, Borlaug worked during the Depression as leader in the Civilian Conservation Corps. Many of the people who worked for him were starving. He later said of that experience, "I saw how food changed them-all of this left scars on me." Borlaug did complete his studies, worked in the field of forestry, and remembered a speech he'd heard in college, a lecture called "These Shifty Little Enemies that Destroy our Food Crop." When Borlaug's job in forestry was eliminated, he went on to receive a doctorate in plant pathology and genetics. Beginning work in Mexico in 1944, Borlaug and his team researched ways to defeat rust, a parasitic fungus in wheat plants. Their research (done long before gene-splicing was even discovered) led to the development of new semi-dwarf, disease-resistant varieties of wheat. By 1963, almost 20 years later, the harvest was six times larger, and Mexico had become an exporter of wheat. Borlaug was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970. In his Nobel Lecture, he speculated on his award:

"When the Nobel Peace Prize Committee designated me the recipient of ...[this] award for my contribution to the *green revolution*, they were in effect, I believe, selecting an individual to symbolize the vital role of agriculture and food production in a world that is hungry, both for bread and for peace."

Good Seeds. The heritage seeds kept safely in Decorah and the wheat grains now scattered throughout the world are examples of Good Seeds. Some good seeds are heritage seeds, and some are the result of years of research and trial and error. Our world needs both: seeds that are heirlooms, seeds that produce the remembered-from-childhood, right out-of-the-garden best tasting juiciest tomato around.

We also need seeds that are the product of innovation, the product of breeding plants for specific characteristics. Heritage seeds and cross-bred seeds. Both can be “Good Seeds”

I think we each have good seeds, some that have been planted, some already harvested, some still to be sown. These seeds may be dreams, ideas, hopes, wishes-whatever it is; it is something in each of us and in our communities that wants to come to fruition.

I’d like to share with you some of what I know about seeds. First, the basics: seeds need to be planted. Each year that the seeds in a package -for example, lettuce or beets, are not planted, the percentage of seeds that will germinate goes down. This is not good news for procrastinators! If you have a good seed--do not delay!

Some seeds need neighbors, sometimes known as plant buddies or companion plants that provide shade or a needed nutrient in the soil. There are lists of plant buddies: peas with caraway, turnips with thyme, and marigolds with just about anything!

When I helped my mom plant the garden, we put carrot and radish seeds in the same row. The radishes would be ready in four weeks and by the time they were pulled out, the slower growing carrots had room to expand and didn’t need to be thinned. Growing them together was easier.

It may be that some of the things that are growing in us need companions. In the first reading from the book of Wisdom, we hear that “those who are just must be kind.” Maybe justice and kindness help each other when they are grown together.

Our new prayer book--still new to me after 2 years--has introduced me to writings of Francis I’d not really considered before. During “A Salutation of the Virtues” used during the Easter season, I noticed that Francis wrote the following:

**“Hail, Queen Wisdom!
May the lord protect you with your sister, holy pure simplicity!
Lady holy poverty,
may the lord protect you with your sister, holy humility!
Lady holy charity,
may the Lord protect you with your sister, Holy obedience”**

And I wonder, does wisdom need simplicity to grow? Are humility and poverty twins that belong together? Are charity and obedience two sides of the same coin? Why did Francis pair these virtues the way he did? Do they grow best when they grow together? I end up with more questions than answers!

Just as there is a time for planting and growing, there is a time for harvesting. I’m the oldest of 11 children, and I remember going out to the garden with mom when I was about 4 or 5. Through the years, as the family grew larger, the garden grew smaller, so the younger members of the family didn’t have the same gardening experiences. When the youngest Mark had a place

of his own, he decided to plant a garden. Among other things, he planted potatoes. Near the end of summer, a neighbor came to visit and they were standing near the garden. Mark told him he didn't understand why his potatoes weren't growing. There was all this green leafy stuff, and no potatoes. The neighbor grabbed a nearby shovel, pushed it into the ground, turned over the clod of dirt and out tumbled some potatoes. Nobody had ever told my brother that potatoes grow underground.

Sometimes when we plant our good seed, we wait for a harvest. It doesn't come and we don't know why. Then all of a sudden it is there-a plentiful harvest! Looking back, we can see that it was growing all the time. We have a fullness, an abundance we never expected. The good seed has done its work.

At the end of today's gospel, Jesus refers to himself as the Chosen One, and to the citizens of the kingdom as the good seed. We are that good seed in our time, scattered and sown by Jesus. We have taken root.

**May we yield a harvest of justice and kindness,
wisdom and simplicity,
and poverty and humility in our community and for the world.**