

15th Sunday 2011

If my homily this morning sounds like it was written on vacation by a seashore, you're right. I suppose that's why the line from the scriptures that first captured my attention was "after leaving the house, Jesus went down to the seashore". Really the lakeside. Even though it was called the Sea of Galilee it's really a Lake.

Has anyone been to the Sea of Galilee? If you have, you can easily imagine this scene in the Gospel which we just heard. If you've not been to the sea of Galilee and you need an image, don't think of Cape Cod Bay but rather Lake Winnepausakee or better Lake Winnisquam. The sea of Galilee (Lake Kinnereth) is 11 miles long, 7 miles wide and at its deepest point it is only 150 feet deep. Or if you really want an image of the Sea of Galilee you can turn your iPhones or Droids or Blackberrys on and go to bibleplaces.com. It will give you a lovely image of the Sea of Galilee seen from the northwest, relatively near the town of Capernaum where Jesus stayed when he wasn't journeying.

St. Ignatius in his spiritual exercises asks the person praying to "imagine themselves in the scene". That's why I've asked you to use your imagination and see in your mind's eye a lakeshore, a crowd of people, Jesus getting into a boat so that all can hear him. I was wondering about that detail when I was praying this morning. Why a boat if he wanted to be heard? That struck me as strange but then I realized, having spent the past week of so near the shore of Cape Cod Bay, that sound travels from the water to the shore. When I was a child and we spent our summers on the north shore of Long Island, our house was right on the water and when I was put down for an afternoon nap, I would fall asleep listening to the sounds from the beach that had a remarkable clarity, even if they were far away. To this day, I go back to that experience of sound if I need some help falling asleep.

Are you with me? Have you found your image of the lakeshore? Can you image Jesus in the boat? Can you hear the clarity of his voice, reflecting off the water, traveling from his lips to your ears. And what are you hearing? "A sower went out to sow seed." You've heard him speak like this before. He's speaking in parable. Not a narrative, not a teaching, not an instruction but something mysterious, enigmatic like a poem, or a Japanese haiku, words that are meant to get you thinking and feeling, words that are meant to

penetrate, sink deep down, grab hold of you. Words that are seeds that just might grow into something more.

A sower went out to sow his seed. Can you see the sower in your mind's eyes? Can you see him/her casting seed? Of course you can, after all you live in the Galilee region which is renowned for its fertility. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that the Galilee region was "wonderful in its characteristics and in its beauty. Thanks to the rich soil there is not a plant that does not flourish there, and the inhabitants grow everything: the air is so temperate that it suits the most diverse species." (bibleplaces.com)

Can you imagine more than the sower? Can you imagine the good soil, the footpath, the rocky ground, the thorny bushes? Can you feel the texture of the soil, the good earth, the hard, flat surface of the path, the jagged, rough rocks, the prickly thorns? And from Jesus' lips to your ears, you hear these words that make you wonder. *A sower went out to sow.* Where is he going with this? What is he speaking of? What does Jesus want you to hear?

What does Jesus want you to hear today? Does Jesus want you to ask yourself how receptive you are to his words of life? How receptive are you to God's commands of love of neighbor? How receptive are you to Jesus' call to live his mission of forgiveness in the midst of such a troubled and turmoil-filled world? How receptive are you to hearing the words of people whom you find difficult to listen to? How receptive are you to other people's ideas, those whom you are not predisposed to listen to without judgment and critique?

Can we look at ourselves today in the light of the parable of the sower and ask ourselves: what are the places in my own life where the seed of love, justice, peace, reconciliation can't be sown because my "surface" is too hard, like the footpath, or the rocky ground, too thorny and weed choked by my own cares and concerns. What is the seed I am sowing in my family, my work? Seeds of discontent, prejudice, negativity? Or seeds of compassion and understanding? And what are the places in my own life where I am "good soil", receptive, open, well-disposed to hear Jesus' call, Jesus' challenge from his lips to our ears.

There is a powerful imagine in the Hebrew Scriptures of the voice of God resounding across the waters. Today we are invited to hear the voice of Jesus in its clarity and resonance, resounding across the waters, from his lips to our ears. *"A Sower went out to sow"*