

Miracle Grow 101

Mark 4:26-32

6/17/12 GSW

I'm pretty sure you know what "Miracle Gro" is, right? Whether or not you use it, it's a pretty familiar brand: the plant food marketed to make your plants grow in amazing ways – turns your flowers and vegetables into super-plants. In the advertisements the master gardeners are so pleased with Miracle Gro that "it's all I use", they say! Maybe it's all you use too – or maybe you have a problem with Miracle Gro. My intention here is not to start a gardening discussion or debate – although I could learn a lot from many of you. However, I do have a problem with Miracle Gro – not with the product, but with the name. Not the fact that it spells "Gro" G-R-O, although that does kind of irritate me when brands do that to words; my problem is the name "Miracle"...

Really? This stuff performs miracles? This is a product name with incredible hubris – because the answer is: No – it does not do miracles – that is false advertising. It does help things grow, quite impressively, but claiming that this stuff works miracles is certainly overstating its case – it just helps things grow – perhaps instead it should be called "Amazing Plant Grower" – but I probably don't have a future in advertising. The truth is, what really is a miracle is that things grow at all, with or without any help. I saw a lot of things growing this week as our group hiked the Appalachian Trail! – and none of them with the help of Miracle Gro! I just want you to think about this for a bit – why is it that you don't find any seed assembly kits: "make your own seeds", or any "make your own plant" packs? Well, because we humans don't know how to do that. We do know what it takes for things to grow and how to help things grow – lots of great knowledge about that; but how to make life itself? How to put together stuff that has life? We don't know how to do that – that is a miracle beyond our grasp. And mind you, this is not some sort of anti-science riff I am giving here – science is what tells us this. Science gives us the capacity to study how things grow and live, as well as exploring the mystery of life coming to be. The real 'miracle grow' is that there have come to be things that grow – and we don't know how to do that.

Perhaps you can see that this is leading us toward the parable Jesus told – the different parable of the sower that we've heard today. Not that Jesus was making a commentary on

fertilizers and scientific exploration – but Jesus is speaking about mystery; and is in fact speaking to what we do NOT know. Jesus tells a story that ends with what you don't know – and that's a GOOD thing! A sower scatters some seed – and then, his work done – he waits – sleeps at night and gets up for the day. And soon enough, sure enough, the seed grows – sprouts and strengthens and matures. And when the grain is ripe, the sower is now the harvester, and he sickles the wheat.

It's a simple story – but I left out the most important part – when it says: 'the seed grows, the sower knows not how.' Now, this sower is not dim – he is insightful. Of course he knows what it takes to grow the seed – soil and water and sun. But he doesn't know how to make the seed – how to make such a thing as a seed that grows. The sower knows this is a mystery – so he does what he knows – he takes the seed and sows.

So how about this for a summary of this parable: 'This is what the kingdom of God is like', Jesus says, 'it's that you don't know.' How does that sound? Does it sound like good news? It is. Because what Jesus is pointing out to those who would follow him, is that in the life of faith it is crucial to keep straight who is doing the sowing and who is doing the growing. Now one thing that I try NOT to do with parables is to make them into little one-to-one match-ups: such as the sower is this, the seed is that, the soil is this – instead I think it's usually more helpful to try and get an image from the parable as a whole, or to put ourselves in the position of various characters in the parable. But in this case, I'd like to make an exception to that open-ended parable view. Because when we've heard that more familiar sower parable (the one we're NOT reading), there often is the connection of God being like that sower. So, with this parable I want to say – DON'T think that – because this one is different. In fact what I would ask you to do with this parable is to see YOURSELF as the sower – this parable calls out an image of US as sowers. We are sowers who scatter seed – who try to be about things that will bear good fruit...but we don't know. You don't know how much will come of anything you do – you don't know when and where and how what you do and are will bear fruit. You don't know, so just sow. Which is kind of a catchy phrase, I think – 'you don't know, so just sow'! Maybe I could be in advertising after all.

But I don't want to be misleading – because 'you don't know, just sow' does really come out of knowing something. The 'not knowing' of the sower is connected to what we do know

about the grower: the good news that God takes what we sow, and does make it fruitful. We don't know when and where and how, but we know that God does and can bring good fruit out of our faithfulness – the seeds we sow. It comes from knowing that the miracle and mystery of God's grace at work in life is beyond understanding, but it does happen – in us and through us. It's really a remarkably freeing word – here's your job: share the gift life is – take the gifts you have and put them to work – scatter the seeds – sow life. And the miraculous thing about this parable, and this kingdom of God, is that you are called to do so not wondering IF the seeds you scatter will grow – because it says here they WILL grow – you just don't know when or where or how. It's an image of living life in a way that simply puts yourself out there faithfully, and God will make it fruitful; you are the sower – God is the grower. When you realize that you don't know HOW God will use your life for the kingdom, but you do know that in the mystery and miracle of God's promises that God WILL – then you can just sow – not having to measure your life by any other standard than that you are sharing the gifts God has given.

I thought about that this past week as I hiked the trail in connection to the three saints whose funerals were held the week before – Elsie Lamb & Frank Sherburne & David Klooster – each people who sowed the seeds of life through their lives; each with such different gifts God had given, different paths in life – but each of them people who so abundantly scattered, sowed that seed of faithfulness in their lives. And you could see the way God brought such abundant blessings, fruitfulness, from each of their lives – everyday miracles of life brought into being through them.

Such saints help us to see that this parable is both a freeing word and a humbling word – it's humbling to hear Jesus say: 'gather close and I'll tell you how the kingdom of God works – it's like this, ready? – you don't know.' It's humbling because we're not in charge – not in charge of God's Spirit, God's grace, God's timing, God's love, God's gifts – we don't know how and where and when God is bringing to fruition the way of life given in Christ. And yet that is the freedom – to live life abundantly – sowing extravagantly and knowing that God will do the growing.

With apologies to the fertilizer company, I'd like to co-opt that name "miracle grow" as a good title for God's kingdom. It is the miracle of life and new life that God has given to us in

Christ, and then calls us to sow – to scatter that life to this world – and God will bring it to fruition – the miraculous kingdom of sower and grower. You don't know how God will use your life, but you know God will. You do the sowing – God will do the growing. Thanks be to God.
AMEN.