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I don't get it. There are some things I just don't understand. Like why we have mosquitos that carry diseases such as malaria, West Nile Virus, and one I heard a lot about this summer in northern Indiana, equine encephalitis. Why have an insect that bites people, anyway? I just don't get it.

And another thing: Why do cells mutate and rapidly grow out of control and spread throughout the body, creating a cancer that harms the body that the cancer cells need to live? I just don't get it.

How about this one: Why do people create more and more ways of destruction and war, often with the results that no one really wins? Instead of fighting over what we don't have, why not just give thanks for what we do have? I just don't get it.

I imagine the disciples of Jesus may have uttered a similar phrase as Jesus began teaching in parables, stories he used to make a point. A large crowd had gathered—so big, in fact, that he had to get into a boat and speak to them from the water while the crowd sat on the beach.

He began by saying, "Listen up. A farmer went out to plant seeds. Some fell on the path, and of course, the birds had a delicious snack."

"Other seeds ended up on the rocks. Have you ever noticed that seeds can sprout quickly anywhere—even rocks? But of course, they won't thrive long when the sun scorches them."

"Another group of seeds sprouted in a thorn patch and got all tangled up—they didn't last long either."

"But the fourth group of seeds landed on good soil and created a lot of grain to harvest. So, if you have ears, listen up!"

I imagine one of the disciples saying to another, "I don't get it. Why's he giving a lesson on planting? I'm not a farmer, but even I understand how to plant a seed! What's his point?"

Another disciple might have chimed in, "Yeah, and everyone here has ears, so who's he talking about when he says, 'listen up'? I just don't get it."

Jesus later met privately with his disciples and suggested that they have received spiritual insights,

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but some others will listen and not understand. I imagine the disciples shuffling their feet and feeling a bit uncertain, though not willing to admit that they don't understand either. Before any of them could confess their confusion, Jesus explained the parable privately to them. The seeds refer to Jesus' teachings. Those that fall on the path get stomped on by evil; the ones in the rocks represent people who get into hard times and fall away; the ones in the thorns are those who get tangled up in unhealthy desires and get choked. The ones in the good soil are the ones who follow Jesus' teachings.

"Ahh. That makes more sense," the disciples may have replied. But secretly they may have thought, "I don't get it. Which seed am I?"

Have you ever wondered which seed you are, where you fit into this parable? We'd all like to be the good seed that grows into healthy plants, but how many of us have ever taken the wrong path and found ourselves confronted by our bad choices?

How many of us have fallen into hard times and gotten stuck between a rock and a hard place?

How many of us have gotten trapped by temptations that have snarled us in a thicket of trouble?

Even though we go to church and try follow Jesus' teachings, I imagine at one time or another every one of us has had the characteristic of one of these bad seeds. Does that mean we don't have the secret knowledge that Jesus offered his disciples?

No one is exempt from the struggles or temptations of seeds scattered in the wrong place at the wrong time, as was the case with

a group of ministers and a salesmen organization [who] were holding conventions in the same hotel. The catering department had to work at top speed serving dinners to both. The salesmen were having "Spiked Watermelon" for dessert. But the [hurried] chef discovered this alcoholic [treat] was being served to the ministers by mistake.

"Quick," he commanded a waiter. "If [the ministers] haven't eaten the watermelon, bring it back and we'll give it to the salesmen."

The waiter returned in a minute and reported it was too late; the ministers were eating the liquor-spiced dessert.

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“Well,” demanded the excited chef, “what did they say? How did they like it?”

“I don’t know how they liked it,” replied the waiter, “but they were dividing up the seeds and putting them in their pockets.”<sup>1</sup>

Before the disciples of Jesus could get too proud of their inside track to secret knowledge, Jesus offered them another word picture

“Does anyone bring in a lamp in order to put it under a basket or a bed? Shouldn’t it be placed on a lampstand? Everything hidden will be revealed, and everything secret will come out into the open. Whoever has ears to listen should pay attention!”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus reminded his disciples that nothing is hidden, and no one has anything secret, for all will come out in the open. Jesus’ teachings are like light, for even if placed under a basket, a little bit seeps through the cracks between the openings in the basket. Even if one tries to hide the light under the bed, the glow will still seep out beneath the blankets draped over the edge of the bed.

But isn’t it better, Jesus suggested, to put the light on a lampstand where everyone can see it?

Why try to hide it, for it’s gonna seep out anyway? Shine the light for everyone to enjoy.

That’s what you and I are invited to be as part of the church—the light of Jesus shining on a lampstand. Even if you’re shy and keep your light under a basket, you still have some light to offer. Even if you’re afraid and keep your light under the bed, you still have light to shine. Even if you have seeds of temptation within you, or seeds of struggle or addiction, or seeds of anger or loneliness, God can help those seeds grow into something, for nothing is hidden from the light. Even seeds tangled in the thorns and struggles of life get a glimmer of light shining through the cracks. Nothing is hidden from God. Nothing can hide from the light of Jesus.

You may not even realize the lamp that shines from your lampstand and how it can make a difference in the lives of others. Disciples preacher Fred Craddock tells about a memory of a teacher who offered him light:

Some years ago, some of us who were ministers, pastors, and teachers in seminaries were asked to form a group and, before a large

body of students and laypersons, to say who was the most influential person apart from our parents in the formation of our lives and our movement to ministry. We had two or three weeks notice, but it was a difficult matter for me. Finally, when my turn came, I stood up and gave them a name they had never heard of. I said, “Miss Emma Sloan.”

Miss Emma Sloan was an elderly woman, single. She taught me in the primary department, and since there was nobody to teach us as juniors, she went right on with us, and taught us for years. She gave me a Bible. She wrote in the front: “May this be a light to your feet, a lamp for your path. Emma Sloan.” She taught us to memorize the Bible; she never tried to interpret it. I don’t remember her ever explaining anything...

I had to say to those students and church folk that Sunday afternoon, “I can’t think of anything, anything in all my life that has made such a radical difference as those verses. The

Spirit of God brings them to my mind appropriately, time and time and time again.”<sup>3</sup>

We have among us some lights who we see every week—elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers, Council and team/Board and committee members, and those who make beautiful music in our church. But there are many other lights among us that be less visible, such as those who prepare or serve meals, count money, clean our building, serve in our community, and attend worship week after week. None of our lights are hidden. God has scattered us as seeds of hope in a world looking for meaning, and Jesus invites you to put your light on a lampstand to shine forth God’s light of love to the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Hodgins, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 913-920). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #29.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 4:21-23, *Common English Bible*

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<sup>3</sup> Fred B. Craddock; Mike Graves; Richard F. Ward. *Craddock Stories* (Kindle Locations 455-466). Kindle Edition.