**5 Pentecost, July 13, 2014; Gen 25: 19-34, Ps119:105-112, Rom 8:1-11, Matt 13:1-9,18-23;**

**Rev. Mary Trainor**

I have read the children's book, "Miss Rumphius," aloud many times It is an award winner that has stood the test of time-- written 30 years ago. The book is about a woman, Alice Rumphius, who lived along the coast of Maine and who wanted to make the world more beautiful as her life contribution. The way she decided to do this was to scatter seeds of the beautiful native Lupine plant wherever she walked - and over a period of years, she walked and sowed seeds and walked and sowed. The result was a legacy of beautiful 1-4' tall, bluish purple flower spikes all over the place -- all because of Miss Rumphius. Oh, Miss Rumphius sowed seeds on paths, on rocky ground and among thorns-- as well as sowing seeds on good soil -- but the end result was a multiplication of the plant. Before she sowed the seeds, there were very few Lupines and years after she sowed the seeds there was a huge population. A seed is an amazing thing -- it has a complex anatomy actually, consisting of a seed coat, a seed leaf, and the embryo. I have some Lupine seeds with me here this morning, from my garden. All that is needed to make a new plant is in that tiny seed. It matters where the seed lands for its chances to germinate, to grow. A seed grows quickly into a new plant if the seed lands in a place that has all the physical requirements it needs to put out roots and shoots. If a seed does not have all those requirements, it just sits there - it does not develop.

Today in our Gospel, we heard Jesus give the parable of the sower. This parable is interesting in that it is one of only two of Jesus' 40 parables that includes an explanation! A parable is a fictional story that teaches us a lesson. In today's lesson, Jesus goes out in a boat to do His teaching. He is doing this for a reason, because from the boat many more people can hear Him. This is a turning point in His ministry, where He changes from being just a popular man of the people to an authoritative teacher. Today's teaching is about our receptivity to and sharing of the Word of God. The sower sprinkles seeds all over -- on paths, rocky ground, among thorns, and on good soil. Some of the seed sprouts and develops, while other seeds do not. The seed symbolizes the Word of God, the Bible; it stands for Jesus Christ Himself; it has everything in it to give us new life, abundant life. It is, as our Psalm 119 tells us today, "***a lantern to my feet and a light upon my path.***" God's Word guides us, helps us make right decisions; teaches us the way.

In our lives, the Word of God is sprinkled upon us through our senses via reading and hearing and experiencing God's love. But, as we all know, it can go in one ear and out the other; it can bounce off; we can chose not to hear it or apply it. We are a stubborn lot, and we seem to think that we have the answers about things within us -- yet we don't. We need God. Paul speaks about the consequences if we chose to live this self-centered way, the "way of the flesh," in our reading from Romans this morning. He says, "***those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."*** A life that is centered around self is a narrow and misguided, and leads downward; a life in God's Spirit leads upward: to peace and joy and abundant life.

Using the seed terminology from the Gospel, the life of the flesh is like a life where the Word of God lands on the hardened rocky or thorn-filled soils of our hearts. Oh, we physically hear the words (it lands on us), but we don't really listen and apply them. Or, we chose to treat God's Word just like any other information coming at us, and so it gets forgotten.

So, what is it like when the Word of God lands on good soil? We want to be good soil. How do we do this? We can make a decision to really listen; this is what Jesus is saying, "***Let anyone with ears listen***!" To focus our brains and hearts, concentrating on the content, making the effort to process tune in. With tuning in comes questions -- we don't understand many passages of the Bible when we first hear them, and so questions pop in our heads. This is what is supposed to happen! And as we study God's Word, they begin to make sense to us. This sermon time provides just a little bit of illumination for just a fraction of the four Bible passages we hear every Sunday. And, as God's Word is inwardly processed and applied in us, good things happen. These good things, called "fruit" in the Bible, include loving our neighbor as ourselves, reaching out to care for those in need, sharing God's message of salvation, being generous and patient with those who are not that way to us. Jesus ends the parable saying, "***as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."*** The fruit yields are all good, Jesus says-- the Word of God is to be lived and shared.

Their names are clearly written in my heart: they are the people who sowed the seeds of the Gospel into me over the past many years. There were many of them, and the seeds sometimes landed on rocky or thorn infested soils in me. It began with Annette and Clotilde, who taught me how to pray as a child. Then, as an adult, Joe and Pat invited me to the Episcopal Church. Judy and Linda and Don and Damon all welcomed me and showed me God's love, even though I did not attend church every week. Then Richard taught me about having a relationship with Christ, and Lorna taught me how to really pray. Cathy taught me about clinging to God through adversity. A great many people sowed a great many seeds over the year. One at a time, these patient people sowed the seeds of God's Word into me -- and they must have thought that the seeds landed on rocky ground or thorny ground -- but the soil eventually was watered and tilled by God enough that the seeds took root.

Who has sprinkled the Word of God into you, and what is happening to it? Who have you been sharing God's Word with? We are entrusted with Jesus' mission of sowing today. Do we only sow the seeds when it is a sure thing, or do we do like Jesus did and lavishly share God's Word - and let God do His work in helping those seeds to sprout in people. And the good news is that Jesus invests in us, and will not give up on us in spite of whatever is lazy or reluctant or hardened or rocky or thorny inside of us.

Jesus said He will "***be with us to the end of the age"*** (Matt 28:20), and He "***will never leave us or forsake us"*** ( Deut 31:6, Heb 13:5).

Live "***according to the Spirit,"*** and sow the seeds of Jesus. Amen.