

The Bible is full of metaphors and images for “God,” which we also call the “Spirit of God” or the “Presence of God.” I’m sure we could all name the most obvious ones: God comes to us *like* the SUN, warming us and giving us energy for life. God comes to us *like* LIGHT, and every Christmas Eve we refer to Jesus as the Light, the Light that comes into the world, the Light that darkness cannot put out! We just sang about a TREE OF LIFE as one way that God comes to us. This tree shows up at the beginning in Genesis, and also is a quote from the book of Revelation, which says that its LEAVES can heal the nations. We hear of God coming to Moses in a “burning” bush, *like* a FIRE that did not consume. And we hear of such fire in the Christian Testament also: at Pentecost... the Holy Spirit comes with energy that seemed *like* tongues of fire dancing on heads... and let’s not forget the metaphor of WIND! ... In the the opening of the Bible, God was *like* wind moving over the waters, and in the Christian testament, also at Pentecost, the Spirit came *like* the “rush of a wind!”

Promising to be brief, I want to now look at our central metaphors for this morning. Rocks and Seeds! I think the Rock image is pretty easy to understand, especially for those of us who live along the coastline. Jesus talks first about building a house on sand... not a good idea! Sadly, we now know of houses built on sand that have fallen into the ocean. Then Jesus talks about wisdom of building your house on a rock... Besides natural rocks to build on, most houses nowadays are built with cement foundations. Jesus makes the point that we need to build our thinking and our lives on his teachings, that they are *like* a “rock.” Jesus is saying that his teachings are solid, and won’t let us down, even when storms come upon us. Again, “storms” of life is also a metaphor... the storms could be insulting words, actual attacks, could be

sickness or even real nor'easter storms, but his teachings are like a rock that will help us to stand firm.

Moving on to the metaphor of seeds. How lucky we are that Jesus used seeds as a teaching tool. Seeds are everywhere, and many of us will start planting seeds in gardens or potting soil very soon. So we can think of Jesus' teaching with every seed we plant! Sometimes we *eat* various seeds (sunflower, flax, pumpkin) so we can think of Jesus' teachings with every seed we eat! The core of this parable is that the Word of God is "*like*" a seed that, if given attention, can grow into a beautiful flower or a large tree.

To combine the metaphors: Just like the house that was built on sand can fall down and be destroyed when a storm comes, a seed planted in shallow or rocky soil can be destroyed when the "time of testing" comes. Storms and times of testing will come to us all, so Jesus says we better be sure our house is built on a rock, and our seeds are planted in good soil.

The common thread of both metaphors is what Jesus calls the Word of God, and His own words. We can really bear fruit in this life (we can really thrive and help others thrive) when our roots go in deep into this Word, and when we stand on the solid rock of this Word.

I know that metaphors can seem like abstract ideas, so let me close with a few practical suggestions. Just like a seed starts small, so the teachings of Jesus can start with learning just a few teachings. If you are unfamiliar with the Bible, why not start with reading just one gospel story (the story of Jesus' life)... either Matthew, Mark, Luke or John... and read it in an easier version like the Good News Bible, or The Message or even a children's Bible? I say start with the Good News of Jesus' life, because for Christians, Jesus is the "*Living Word*." We follow a person, not just a set of

ideas. Also feel free to question, to doubt, to wrestle with meanings until you come up with new meanings, even in your own words. After all, God had no megaphone and no audio recording devices. Thus, the “Word of God” comes to us remembered and filtered by human minds and voices. We say in our adult Bible class that we are “exploring” the Bible together, helping each other to find meanings relevant to our times and our lives.

Another great way to find the “seeds” of God’s Word is to pay greater attention to nature itself. We can learn from rain and sun, cold and hot, the rush of a wind and the quietness of a still lake. Obviously this means taking a break from all our technological tools (which researchers are showing is important to our overall health). So spending more time in the great outdoors and in our backyard gardens is one way to do that. Sometimes we need to be quiet to hear God’s voice, and nature provides the perfect place for quiet.

Friends, please plant a few seeds with us after worship, this morning in coffee hour...where there will be seeds in some actual soil, and also seeds of friendship and love that blossom into community. *The pursuit of truth and goodness*, from the Bible and also through commentaries and teachings of great philosophers and poets over the ages, will grow and grow, and such dedication to *learning* can make the world a better place. As surely as a seed can make a strong tree and bear much fruit, so can even small efforts to live by God’s values make a big difference in our communities. We can start small, one step at a time, one seed at a time, following Jesus, the *Living Word*. Amen.