



## *Thoughts on the Journey...*

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These days, my alarm goes off at 4:50 a.m. every morning. It sounds like a national emergency warning device that scares the daylight out of me every time! My morning state of consciousness (or lack thereof) calls for such measures. Once in awhile I will hit the snooze button, but to spare myself hearing that horrible sound again I usually put a stop to it by dragging myself into the day. I grab my bathing suit, towel, goggles, and gym bag and head to the YMCA's Wendel Pool in Lancaster.

Once I have arrived at the 'Y', there is an order to everything I do so as to quickly get my much needed exercise off the day's docket. Each day for the past three months as I enter the pool area, there is a young woman who is stationed on a folding chair. She has a set of head phones plugged in her ears, a life preserver on the floor next to her feet, a smart phone in her hands that she never looks up from, and she is fully clothed. She is the lifeguard on duty. Based on her appearance and posturing, I have a strong suspicion that if I was drowning she would be oblivious. Regardless, each morning I make an attempt to smile and say hello to her. I figure, if this is the person who is going to drag my carcass out of the water in the event that my heart gives out, it would behoove me to let her know I'm there. Also, it wouldn't hurt to be kind to her in an effort to appeal to her sense of duty. Each morning, whether intentional or not, she ignores my greeting: not a smile, not a wave, absolutely no acknowledgement of my presence. If you think any of this gives me confidence in her willingness to save my life, it doesn't!

In addition to my determination to exercise, I was now determined to get a greeting out of her. It was a challenge that initially lacked the catalyst of kindness that should have been at the heart of my outreach but, kind or not, I wasn't giving up on her!

For the first couple of weeks, my laps would begin with resentment in the form of, "what's her problem?". After days of asking myself that very question with all kinds of *attitude*, I started taking the question to heart – to the heart of God.

In the Gospel of Matthew this week Jesus is speaking to crowds of people about the kingdom of God. As he often did, he used a parable to connect his listeners to the familiar—in this case the familiar was farming. Jesus used the parable of the sower, his seeds, and the ground where the seeds landed. He identified four different kinds of ground: a path where birds ate the seeds, rocky soil where the seeds could not take root, ground with thorns that choked the plant, and rich soil that brought forth an abundance of grain. Just like the word of God, the seed of God's word either takes root and grows or it withers and dies. Jesus further clarified his parable by saying,

**“...the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.”**

In the parable of the sower, Jesus is speaking to the inner landscape of the human heart. Throughout life, we are rarely one kind of soil. Depending on our circumstances and where we are on the faith journey, the word of God either transforms us and brings forth new life or it does not produce fruit for the kingdom.

Jesus is also speaking to the sower who sows the same seeds in all four soils. You may question the wisdom of the God-sower, but he is a generous God who shows no partiality. Everyone has access to the seeds regardless of the condition of your heart. Jesus threw out love like the sower throws out the seed. He knows it may fall bad, but he gives it anyway. He knows it may take years to flower but, God doesn't stint the seed, nor does he stint love.

Back to the lifeguard... when I took my question, (*what's her problem?*) to the heart of God, he answered me quite clearly: *the one who hears my word and lives it, bears fruit. Never stop spreading seeds of love and mercy regardless of the soil it falls upon.*