

BaptistWay Bible Series for February 1: Realistic encouragement

January 19, 2009

It is an understated cliché in the life of any Christian to ask the questions, “Why do I even try?” or “What is the point of it all?” Both are relevant and fair questions in a life of faith.

The God we worship and understand to be the sovereign Lord of this universe understands these questions and the seeming paradox they present. In this week’s lesson, we find the disciples of Jesus asking the same question, “What is the point?” Together, we will seek to answer that very question.

Many remember the story of John Chapman, better known as Johnny Appleseed, from when we were children. Johnny was a pioneer nurseryman who traveled through Ohio, Illinois and Indiana planting apple trees. He was also a frontier missionary who visited people’s homes spreading the good news of the gospel as he worked planting trees. To this day, Johnny Appleseed remains an American ambassador of goodwill.

As members of the Christian faith, we are all commissioned to be “Johnny Appleseeds” for Christ. This means we serve our respective congregations, ministries and communities in order to plant seeds of hope and encouragement in the lives of all we encounter for the sake of the gospel.

The challenge of this commission is handling the people Jesus puts in our path because, more often than not, many seeds will never grow. In fact, each one of us most likely can remember a time when a seed was planted in a person we knew, but they never found the understanding needed in order

to grow. This is a sad and daunting realization for every Christian.

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus describes three different types of people we face as Christians. The first type stands on rocky ground. They mature quickly enough once the seed has been planted, but are supplanted just as quickly as time progresses—or digresses. They are seeds that are never deeply rooted and are swayed by misunderstanding.

The second kind of person stands on ground surrounded by vines covered in thorns. They grow steadily; however, as their growth becomes taller and wider the vines and thorns emerge and choke further progress. They are seeds that take root, but die soon either after when the worries of life overburden them.

Finally, the third person stands on firm ground. The seed is placed on good, fertile soil and, under the right conditions, produces much more than what was expected when the season for reaping comes around. They are seeds that take root and continue to grow no matter what season it may be.

No matter what particular situation you find yourself in, we all encounter doubts and the question, “Am I doing any good?” The fact is, we all desire for every seed to be planted on solid ground and to grow abundantly. It is discouraging that most of us will never witness the results of the harvest and as result the threat of despair becomes an ever-present reality. Some of us, as a result of that despair, become so discouraged we surrender to oppression and give-up on God and the people he created.

Perhaps this is why Jesus tells his disciples that, “Though seeing, they do not see, though hearing, they do not hear or understand.”

Perhaps this is why Jesus describes sowers planting seeds on an array of different ground. We are a diverse creation made to fly with the power of Jesus, but some of us deliberately choose to sink like stones in a body of

water. Simply put, it is not up to the planter what the ground does with the seed.

As Christians living to express love to others, it is important to remember that it is up to the people whom we serve to make a decision to grow or not. And it is up to Jesus to reap the harvest planted by his followers.

Again, as the disciples asked of Jesus, “What is the point?” As facilitators of the faith, we are called to be sowers of seeds and celebrants of the harvest Jesus has in store. So when you begin to wonder what the point of ministry is, do not despair. Be encouraged and stand firm on the solid ground and continue to be a “Johnny Appleseed” of Jesus.

Questions to consider

- *What can you do to find encouragement in your life with Jesus with the despair of planting seeds among such diverse people?*
- How can you be a better “Johnny Appleseed” for Jesus?
- How can you be a better facilitator of seed growth?