SOWING SEEDS ON GOOD SOIL
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Gardeners are always hoping for good soil in which to plant. A recent theme throughout the summer months for me has been one of different soil types: at home our May and June plantings in the vegetable garden depended on the right combo of soil, sun and rain, and a July sermon at church focused on planting seeds in good soil to produce the best spiritual results. Conversely, seeds of doubt that fall on "fertile soil" could serve to taint the desired result.

This theme woven throughout my summer experiences has been impactful. I can tell you that the carrot, beet and zinnia seeds in my home garden met with different results given the care they got as well as the soil type. The zinnias are flourishing because I planted them near the house, thinned and transplanted the seedlings and watered them every day for a week to give them a good start; that soil gets more attention because I have prioritized that plot. I have great zinnias in my cutting garden to add pops of color to arrangements I create throughout the summer months.

By comparison, the beets and carrots are further from my door and the soil stays wet because of low elevation. These seedlings did not fare as well because the soggy soil is not as conducive to germination. Had I worked that soil to dry it out a bit, the seedlings would have been more productive. I am confident that the time I spent, though admittedly not much of it, will result in some beets and carrots. The soil will support the growth of those vegetables, but only consistent with the energy I put forth. Ultimately the combination of sun and rain will be a big factor. We'll see how it all works out for those vegetable plants as the summer unfolds.

I mentioned earlier that I have had the good fortune to spend quite a bit of time in three very different geographic locations this summer. Three very different soil types are the norm in those three locations. First, I am fortunate to have reasonably fertile soil at home in the East Berlin area. With regard to composition of the soil, it has a lot of clay and quite a few rocks, but by amending the soil for planting with top soil and peat, then mulching it regularly each year, that soil is pretty predictable. Having my soil tested helps; the soil is generally acidic and I amend it to keep it neutral in terms of pH value.

At our cabin in Northern Pennsylvania, my gardening is very limited due to a shorter growing season. I am not there to tend the soil regularly, and watering is through rain only except when I can be there with a sprinkling can. Tomatoes don't always ripen in a growing season - one year I got 2 red tomatoes on two stalks. Not very fruitful! The soil in general in that Northern plot of land is bad. There is little top soil due to logging many years ago. What soil is there is full of small rocks and pebbles that making digging very difficult. In beds along the buildings I have mulched and added fertilizer to encourage good seeds to sprout, producing good plants.
However, the short growing season works against me every time. But still, I enjoy the challenge and have shrubs that look good and a few perennial flowers that are tenacious enough to grow and produce despite the soil composition and amount of sunshine available. Planting seeds is not worth the effort, so I just don't do it anymore. I am not able or willing to turn it into fertile soil. My choice!

The third location is a real example of overcoming the odds! The sandy shores of New Jersey never fail to amaze me. Some of the best gardening results anywhere can be found in the plantings around beach houses on the Jersey shore. I am constantly amazed at the bright and beautiful combinations of annuals, perennials and shrubs. I don't own property there, although I would like to! I don't know what these property owners do to amend the sandy soil. There may not be a lot of seeds sown, but rather established plants, and they certainly do flourish in that environment. There are a fair number of automatic sprinklers in evidence, which helps. And lawn services flourish on the Jersey Shore. Neither of these conveniences is available to me for making my gardens grown, but I like the idea!

Ultimately, the composition of the soil in which we sow our seeds or deposit our plants is a very important part of what we get in return. How we tend the soil definitely impacts the result. And as the pastor said this past Sunday, how a message is conveyed is certainly dependent on the way we present it -- or how we tend it -- or the care we give it. Have a great week and Happy Gardening!

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