

A NOTE TO PARENTS

Jesus did much of his teaching in *parables* or stories, and our tendency in approaching the parables is to attack them as if they were cryptograms to be decoded: “Who is the farmer? What does the seed stand for? What are the birds?” We are not the only ones to want to take this approach—Matthew tells us that the disciples “in private” begged Jesus to explain his stories, and now and then Matthew obliges us with neat interpretations along the lines of “A=A₁, B=B₂,” and so on. But more frequently we only find that Jesus concluded a parable by saying, “If you have ears, then hear.”

The trouble with trying to decode a parable, especially as we go to work on every last detail, is that it reduces the story to a puzzle to be solved by the intellect. It leads us to expect that once we can assign an interpretation to each character and situation, we have “understood” the story’s “meaning” or “point,” and can restate it faithfully, without using images or metaphor: “God sends out his word, and some people hear it and some people don’t, for the following reasons: (a), (b), (c), (d). The end.” But if that is all the parable means, why did Jesus tell it that way? Does he tell the story in code just to give us the fun of puzzling it out? Or to separate the clever listeners who can break the code from the dull ones who don’t get it—or the in-group who gets the private interpretation from the out-group that doesn’t? Or so that he can say, “But I just told little stories about farmers!” when his enemies attack him for his subversive teachings?

A story is a vivid, memorable way to teach an idea. It is fun to puzzle out the “meaning.” But a good story has more in it than the one “idea” or “meaning” that we can restate with bald literalism. A story appeals to our emotions, and to the part of us that thinks in pictures, in situations, in relationships. It reminds us that our God is a living God, to be met as a Person rather than comprehended as an idea. It helps us know him, learn his style, recognize that style when we meet it elsewhere. The more we think about the story and play with it, the more fruit it bears—like the seed of the Word, “thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold.”

© 1990 by Gretchen Wolff Pritchard. All rights reserved.
THE SUNDAY PAPER, 19 Colony Road, New Haven, CT 06511, USA
203 - 624-2520 • www.the-sunday-paper.com

THE SUNDAY PAPER JUNIOR

Year A
PROPER 10
TRACKS 1 and 2



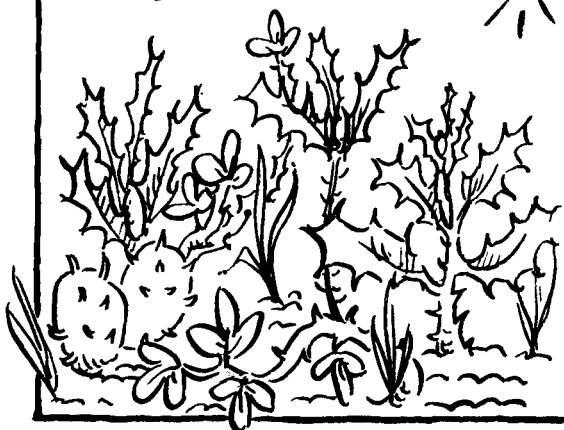
Some of the seeds fell on the hard path. They could not grow, and birds ate them up.



Some landed where it was rocky. Their roots could not find water, so they died.



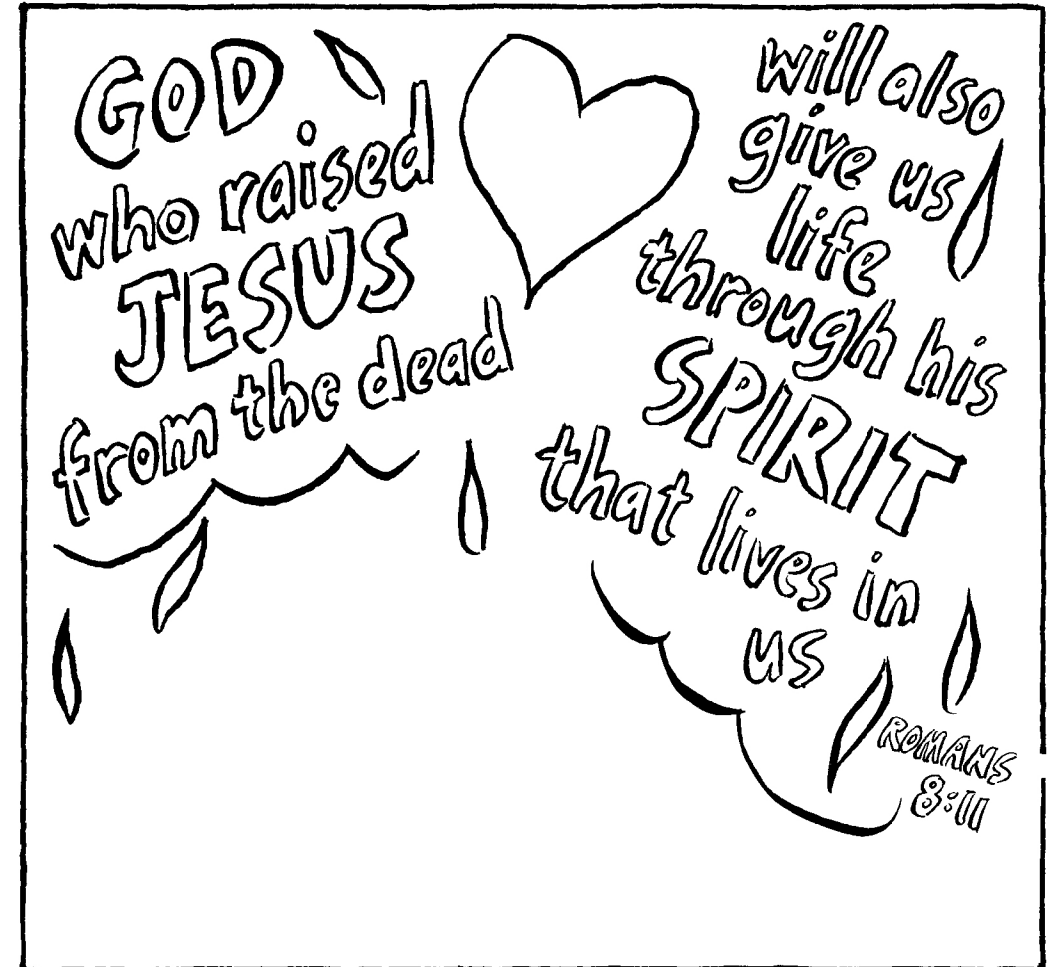
Some landed among thorny weeds. The weeds grew faster, and the young plants died.



Some landed on good deep soil. They grew, and made a big harvest!



Jesus said, "God's Kingdom is like this farmer planting seeds." People who listen to Jesus are like good, deep soil where God's Kingdom can grow, full of love and new life.



Draw yourself in the picture. Talk about the Bible verse. What do you think it means?