

I have never thought more about how we consume things than in these past few months since the pandemic began. It started with the toilet paper panic back in March - people consuming huge amounts of toilet paper to stock up for the pandemic. Still find that a bit weird, but protecting what's vulnerable, I can get that for sure. And for the first time in most of our lives, we dealt with empty grocery store shelves. Basic foods were out of stock for weeks and that incited fearful feelings we never thought we'd encounter. We stocked up on a bunch of food, ate a bunch of snacks, and I know my freezer is still recovering from being packed full with crockpot meals. We dealt with restaurants, businesses, gyms, schools, offices, everything being closed down, unable for us to access or consume what they provide. Our physical world and our relationship with the things and places around us has changed in ways we never imagined or foresaw.

But what has also changed drastically over these few months is what we consume from a content perspective. What mental, emotional, spiritual, and relationship things we consume.

What shows we watch, news and articles and books we read, conversations we have, who we listen to, what corners of the internet we seek out, among many other types of content. I will never forget a conversation I had with a friend, where she said, "What we consume mentally and emotionally impacts us just as much as what we consume physically." (repeat)

Our diet of words and images impacts us as much as our diet of food and drink. Our tangible diet and consumption, of food, drink, movement, our physical surroundings, lays the foundation for how we physically exist in the world. But what do we choose to consume as the foundation for our minds? Our hearts? Or our spirits?

The language Jesus uses to describe this phenomenon of our healthy foundation in our spirits is that of good soil. Jesus talks about seeds being scattered around - these seeds are the gifts of the Spirit, the work of God in

our world. The seeds sown in good soil multiplied by huge amounts, providing nourishment for all. The seeds are the works of God in our world, the callings of the Holy Spirit. When we are good soil, we accept this call and have enough fortitude within us to act upon the seeds sown by the Spirit. When we are good soil, our spirits and hearts are nourished, and we in turn nourish the people around us. When we are good soil, we live out God's desire for us, God's love for us.

What helps us get to a place of being good soil is noticing what we do and do not consume, what we do and do not focus on, what is or is not part of our mental or spiritual foundation.

Paul's letter to the Romans, the part of it that we read today, attempts to provide us some clarity on what does and does not create this good soil within us.

Paul's language is centered on what is of the flesh or of the Holy Spirit. He writes about what is of this world, the flesh, and what is greater than what is in the world, the Holy Spirit. The Greek word used in this chapter, *sarx*, means more than just flesh - it means anything that is of human origin or construct, anything that originates from or is powered by the self.

So really, what is of the flesh is what we can control. What is of the flesh is human-made not what is God-ordained. What is of the flesh will perish without the promise of everlasting life. What is of the flesh keeps us from receiving the Spirit. What is of the flesh is like the thorns that surround the seeds in the Gospel text - the seeds try to grow and bring new life, but the thorns choke down this life. What is of the flesh is what keeps us from living into the call of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

There is a difference between feeling and knowing the Spirit in our bodies and focusing on what is "of the flesh". Think of the last time you read an article or a book or said a prayer that spoke to you on a deep level. You felt solidarity and comfort and relief that what was happening within you was

put into words that brought you comfort. Perhaps it was a devotion that made the Word of God more real to you. Maybe it was one of those things you just stumble upon, you take the plunge and have enough courage to devote time to dwelling in these words, and it ends up turning around your whole day. There is a bodily sensation that happens when this in-breaking of the Spirit occurs to us. Usually it's unexpected, but there is a change in heartbeat, in breath, in tension in our bodies. The Spirit sows a seed in the world and it is planted within us, to follow this calling, to provide the opportunity and words for us, to bring this bodily calm and peace which surpasses all understanding.

We cannot ignore that the Spirit works in our bodies - indeed it is the breath of life. But too much focus on things in the immediate world around us, too much focus on the flesh and the surface-level rockiness leads us to distress, and for these seeds to wither away.

Seeds have the power of life all knit up within them. They simply need nourishing conditions and tending in order to grow and thrive. We too have the power of life knit up within us. God has known us and knit us together in our mothers' wombs from the very earliest parts of our life. Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, died and rose again for our very human sakes, for us to have life and have it abundantly, by his sacrifice and love. And the Holy Spirit grounds us and reminds us of life itself in our very breath. The sowing of the seeds of the Spirit is as natural as breathing itself. And in this love of God knit within us, we have the ability to be good and nourishing soil in our life of faith.

But being good soil means that you have enough sustenance within your spirit to take upon the calling of the Holy Spirit. Being good soil is taking care of yourself enough to build up those nutrients of nourishment so you are well-rested, well-fed, and well-loved. Being good soil has so much to do with what you consume or do not consume. And being good soil impacts how you show up for the people and world around you. When we tend to

our own soil, when we nourish our own spirits, that is when we are able to nourish the people we love.

The good soil is what we create within ourselves. The seeds are all around us. The Spirit and new life of Christ Jesus makes that so. But it's in our own nourishing, our growing, our light and openness to the work of the Spirit that allows God's love to shine forth through us.

So what can we do to tend to our soil, to make us this safe and healthy place for the Spirit's work to grow? We must breathe, breathe the power of the Spirit in and out as she continues to bless us with life. We must pray, lift our false idols and thorns of this world to God who continues to love us even through the rockiness. We must lean on the Word of God, giving our minds and hearts the nourishment of the truth and life only found in Christ Jesus our savior, our friend, our Lord. And we must love, in and with and through all things, love God and love the people around us. I pray dear friends that the nourishment of love, Word, prayer, and breath will till good soil within you, and open you to the life-saving gifts of the Spirit who dwells in each of you. Thanks be to God, Amen.

What are the seeds we sow? What seeds are planted within us, and what seeds do we plant for others? What seeds do we plant in the world around us? What do we nurture and tend to, and what do we leave to the unforgiving forces of nature? What do we leave by the wayside to die?