

The backstory for Matthew's parable of the seeds is the Jewish wisdom tradition. *The wise are like a tree planted beside waters that stretches out its **roots** to the stream: It does not fear heat when it comes, its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still produces fruit (Jeremiah 17:8).*

*The foolish scarcely are planted, scarcely sown, scarcely their stem **rooted** in the earth, when the heat breathes upon them and they wither, and the storm wind carries them away like straw (Isaiah 40:24).*

Matthew's parable is a mirror in which we view, not others who are hardhearted, shallow, fickle, but ourselves. The disciples are to understand that they themselves are the issue, and not until they have understood that have they understood.

Understanding is a matter of the head, but not of the head alone. For Matthew, as in Judaism, understanding is the fruit of doing. Wisdom is the harvest of obedience and practice.

"To be rooted," writes Simone Weil, "is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations of the future."

"Every human being needs to have multiple roots, needs to digest, assimilate and create afresh out of deeply rooted treasures. Uprootedness is by far the most dangerous malady to which human societies are exposed."

Beginning in the early 1800s, the U.S. government set up and supported more than 400 boarding schools designed to extinguish indigenous culture and assimilate young Native Americans into white society. The goal, in the words of one of the school's founders, was to "kill the Indian in him and save the man."

Children were forcibly removed from their homes. By 1893, the Bureau of Indian Affairs received congressional authorization to withhold food rations and supplies from American Indian families who refused to enroll or keep their children in boarding schools.

The children were often required to take English names and give up their style of clothing and hair, as well as their traditional languages, religions and cultural practices. An untold number of children never returned home; many died in the school's custody.

This program of family separation and cultural eradication left a legacy of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. This forced uprootedness created intergenerational trauma that lives on into the present.

Our own uprootedness—culturally, historically, intellectually, spiritually—is not forced but freely chosen. Why? Fear of not liking what we see in the mirror? A preference for the easily appropriated fads and fashions of the moment over the hard work of understanding and appropriating afresh the treasures of the past? Idolatry of the dollar?

Simone Weil diagnosed the primary cause of freely chosen uprootedness as a false conception of greatness. As long as we believe that in whatever sphere of endeavor, greatness can be the result of something other than the good, we will fail to create anything of lasting value.

As Christ said, *A good tree brings forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit.* True greatness is the good fruit which grows on a good tree, and a good tree is a disposition of the soul akin to holiness.

“I am beginning to despair,” wrote Adelia Prado, “and can only see two choices: either go crazy or turn holy.” Chasing after false conceptions of greatness will only make us crazy. We turn holy by loving the good which roots us in life-giving wisdom.

A second cause of our freely chosen uprootedness is infidelity to the truth. Truth is the radiant manifestation of reality; to desire truth is to desire direct contact with a piece of reality.

Wiel offers a thought experiment with a choice between two destinies. At this very instant we can either sink immediately and irrevocably into a state of idiocy, in the literal sense of the word, with all the humiliations attended on such a collapse, retaining only sufficient lucidity to be able to feel the full bitterness of our plight;

or we can suddenly and prodigiously develop intellectual faculties, such as to guarantee immediate world-wide fame and after death glory for thousands of years, but with this drawback, our thought would always remain a little bit out of line with truth. She wonders who would even hesitate a moment before choosing.

We are more enslaved than we know to the habits of thinking and feeling prevalent in our moment in history. Digesting, assimilating, and creating afresh out of deeply rooted treasures, loving the good more than power, loving the truth more than fame or fortune, is how we remain faithful in the present and hopeful for the future.