



Sunday July 12, 2020  
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

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### **Reflection: The Parable of the Sower – God’s Abundance**

Today’s parable of the Sower is about the character of God. In this familiar parable many of us have read this by assigning meanings to each part of the parable – the Sower is God, the seed is the Good News of God’s Kingdom, and the soil is our hearts. But the problem is when we use this type of interpretation and the explanation that Jesus gives of this story, we might think that the point is to do everything we can to become good soil. And while God certainly wants us to work on becoming good soil, that isn’t the main focus of this story.

The bigger problem with this kind of interpretation is that it makes the story be about *us*. But the story isn’t *about* you; the story is *for* you. This parable, like all scripture, is really about God and God’s extravagant generosity. God is the Sower, scattering seed liberally, even wastefully, everywhere. It’s what God does. It’s what God keeps on doing. God keeps throwing seeds, regardless of where the seed might land. God is love, and love is generous, lavish, abundant, and eager to share what is good. If there wasn’t a sower who sowed generously, abundantly, even wastefully it really wouldn’t matter what kind of soil our hearts are.

This parable tells of a sower who is ridiculously generous with the amount of seed he scatters, throwing it not only on the good soil but on areas that even non-farmers can recognize wouldn’t be a smart choice – thorny soil, rocky ground, or a beaten path.

But God doesn’t use a computer-driven tractor to plot out perfectly spaced rows, carefully inserting each seed for optimum effectiveness. No, God scatters the Good News of the Kingdom of God liberally, even in places where it’s not likely to grow or bear fruit.

So, whether it falls upon the path, on rocky soil, among thorns, or in the good soil – the Good News of God’s love in Christ Jesus can’t be contained. God doesn’t discriminate between good soil and bad soil. God throws the seed of the Good News of God’s love everywhere! It goes out into all the world, to transform any who will accept it.

But an important question remains – as we hear this parable today and the parables of Jesus over the next few weeks, how will our ears and our hearts hear them? How will we be changed, as we find ourselves drawn into God’s story, as God invites us to become part of it? And how willing are we to be transformed by that story, becoming something, we haven’t been before?

We can find examples of each kind of response to the word throughout Matthew's Gospel. There are many in Matthew's story who "hear the word of the kingdom and do not understand," including the religious leaders who are antagonistic to Jesus' ministry from the beginning. The crowds respond positively to Jesus, especially to his miracles of healing, yet they turn against Jesus at the end and demand his crucifixion, leaving us to wonder whether they ever truly understood.

The disciples themselves might be included among those who fall away "when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word." And the rich young man unable to part with his possessions provides a stunning example of "one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing."

What about the good soil? Who are those "who hear the word and understand it, who indeed bear fruit" and yield an abundant harvest? In Matthew's story it seems they are the least likely ones. Jesus tells the chief priests and elders, "the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you." In the parable of the sheep and the goats, the righteous bear fruit by serving the "least of these," and even they are surprised to find that they have been serving Jesus.

And what about the disciples? Will they *ever* bear fruit? After telling several more parables, Jesus asks them, "Have you understood all this?" And while they confidently answer, "yes," subsequent events will reveal how little they truly understand and how quickly they will desert Jesus to save their own lives. What's remarkable is that in spite of all these failings, Jesus doesn't give up on the disciples. In fact, he continues to invest in them, even to the point of entrusting the future of his mission to them.

And this brings us back to the parable. The main character in the parable, of course, is the sower. The sower scatters his seed carelessly, recklessly, seemingly wasting much of the seed on ground that holds little promise for a fruitful harvest. Jesus invests in disciples who look similarly unpromising. He squanders his time with tax collectors and sinners, with lepers, the demon-possessed, and all types of outcasts. Yet he promises that his reckless sowing of the word will produce an abundant harvest.

It's not difficult to find modern examples of the various responses to the word depicted in Jesus' parable. Having the word choked out by "the cares of the world and the lure of wealth" seems to be a particular problem in our world today.

If we're really being honest with ourselves, then we can probably find evidence of several kinds of soil in our lives on any given day. However, it's important to note that Jesus doesn't use the parable to insist upon hearers to "be good soil." If there's any hope for the unproductive soil, it's that the sower keeps sowing generously, extravagantly, even in the least promising of places. Jesus' investment in his disciples shows that he simply will not give up on them, in spite of their many failings. And we too can trust that he will not give up on us either, but will keep working on whatever is hardened, rocky, or thorny within and among us.

Dear friends, Jesus challenges us to believe in God's abundance. This story is filled with the promise of lavish abundance, even in the face of rejection and the hard realities of living in this world. And this is precisely what strikes me. We live at a time and place where we often feel like there's just never enough – not enough money, or clean water, or fresh air, or fuel, or security, or happiness, or prestige or... well, you name it. Sometimes this feeling comes from the ads we watch, or are subjected to, on TV, the radio, and the internet – ads that strive to create in us a sense of lack and inadequacy that the particular product being advertised can fill. And sometimes this feeling comes from politicians who, regardless of political party, follow a similar strategy by naming what's wrong, what's lacking, what we should fear, and then offering themselves as the solution to our problems. While this strategy is effective for both advertisers and politicians, it has the effect of creating in us a profound sense of scarcity and inadequacy, eventually making us believe not only that we do not *have* enough but ultimately *are* not enough.

Which is why this story of a sower – and by extension God – who scatters seed on all kinds of soil should mean so much to us. God doesn't hold back. God isn't worried about whether there will be enough seed or grace or love. God may want our hearts to be good soil but nevertheless throws a ridiculous amount of seed even on dry, thorny, or beaten soil. Why? Because there *is* enough! And, ultimately, because God believes *we* are enough.

God loves us just as we are and regards us as worthy of being showered with grace. However, loving us *as* we are, isn't the same as being content with *where* we are. In fact, precisely because God loves us God wants us to discover the abundant life of trust in God and love of and service to our neighbors. Precisely because God loves us, God wants us to stand against the fear and scarcity that drives prejudice, racism, greed, and violence.

Precisely because God loves us, God wants to strive for the equality and dignity of all people. Precisely because God loves us, God wants us to share what we have generously so *all* will have enough. Precisely because God loves us, God wants us to grow into the people God knows we can be.

But the fundamental and unifying element in all of God's hopes for us is that they all spring from God's unconditional, even reckless, love for and acceptance of us right here, right now, just as we are. There *is* enough – You *are* enough. And God will *never* give up on us. Thanks be to God! Amen.