

Year A – Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

4th Sunday after Pentecost

July 12, 2020

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Professor Matthew Skinner of Luther Seminary tells the story this week of an area in his garden where nothing grows. Over the years he has spent a great deal of money trying numerous kinds of plants in the hope they will take root and grow. He has spent countless hours reworking the soil. Yet, nothing seems survive more than a single season. Not even deep-rooted weeds. Yet, as he describes it, “like Charlie Brown trying to kick the football, I keep going back to the spot and trying again. It’s not just that I’m stubborn. It’s because I’m a gardener.”ⁱ

Jesus tells the story of a sower who continues to sow season after season scattering seed with seemingly reckless abandonment. A sower who has no regard for where the seed lands or how much of it fails to produce a harvest. Yet, the sower continues to abundantly scatter seed in hopes it will take root and bear fruit. What may seem almost reckless or a complete waste of time and energy is not so to the sower because that is inherent to who this sower is.

Matthew’s gospel Jesus’ parables begin just after he has met rejection, criticism, and disbelief at the hands of the religious leaders and crowds. They have witnessed his miraculous deeds first-hand. Some have doubted, called him demon-possessed, mocked and ridiculed him, been blind to what he does and deaf to what he speaks, and have even begun the plot to have him killed. At the end of Chapter 13 Jesus will even be dismissed in his hometown. He knows first-hand how hard their hearts are, how the lure of wealth, power, and prestige wrap around and choke out their ability to see and hear who He is, how even those who see and believe will later wither away as they succumb to the lies of those seeking to kill him.

It seems logical that his disciples, who have been travelling by his side and who clearly have witnessed the rejection of His message and His miracles, certainly must be scratching their heads a bit and wonder, “Why?” Why does he continue to go to these people? Why does he continue to face the rejection? Why does he waste his time scattering His word when he knows it may not be received? Being

sent out on their own to proclaim the message Jesus has brought they too most certainly have incurred the stares, excuses, and disbelief and might be left wondering how in the world is the kingdom ever going to grow if no one will listen to us? Should we keep going on? Are we doing something wrong?

No, Jesus would seem to imply to the disciples as he explains in private to them the meaning behind the parable. Do not lose hope! Do not give up! Have faith and persevere alongside the sower that spares no expense. The sower that searches the ends of the earth to find that one lost sheep and return it safely to the fold. The sower who despite rejection, disbelief, and doubt continues faithfully to cast seed in hopes of finding the smallest of cracks in an effort for roots to take hold and fruit to spring forth. Jesus' parables are about the kingdom of heaven (i.e., Kingdom of God) He is ushering in. They are about God and they are meant to turn our world upside down and expose us to realities our human minds can't fully grasp or comprehend. At times, His parables do not have a simple answer or clear meaning. They can be like peeling an onion, uncovering one new layer at a time.

Many will hear this parable and not understand. They will hear it, but they really will not hear it or just simply reject it. Many may hear but will eventually forget it and fade away. Many will be so caught up in trying to figure out if they are good soil or not that they will miss the good news of the message. Many will automatically hear it and presume they are good soil because of who they are, what they wear, how much they have, or where they live. Many will immediately begin to stereotype those who must be bad soil and sadly, some, beaten down by society and told they will never amount to anything may immediately assume they too are bad soil and stand outside of God's grace. We often make the leap that this parable is all about us. Who is good soil? Who is bad soil?

As a congregation called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit with the mission to join the almighty Sower in sowing the good news of Jesus Christ we think we need to know where the rocky ground is or the old, trampled down paths so as to not waste any of our seed on those areas (i.e., people). Yet, as noted pastor and theologian Barbara Brown Taylor points out this parable of Jesus is "not about us at all but about the sower? What if it is not about our own successes and failures and birds and rocks and thorns but about the extravagance of a sower who flings seed everywhere, wastes it with bold abandon...confident

that there is enough seed to go around, that there is plenty, and that when the harvest comes in at last it will fill every barn in the neighborhood to the rafters? The focus is not on us and our shortfalls but on the generosity of our maker.” (“The Extravagant Sower” in *The Seeds of Heaven*).

What we see in God incarnate and revealed in Jesus is a sower who spares no expense when it comes to spreading his love, forgiveness, and good news. He is a sower that no matter the rejection faced, the pain it causes, or the thorns he must endure will continue to carry the message he has been entrusted with by his Father in heaven. He is the sower that will bring his message to all regardless of how much money they have, what their name is, where they live, what they drive, or who they know. He is the sower that will plant and bear fruit in the unlikeliest of places and of people. He is the sower that seeks out the sick, the despised, the outcast, the needy, and the sinners. Amen! Yes, that is the grace of an abundant giver. That is the mercy of an extravagant God. That is the richness of a king who spares nothing – not even His own life.

God, the reckless sower, continues to sow seed into the hearts of God’s children. That includes all of us gathered this morning even when at times we, too, say no or don’t always produce the fruit God desires of us. God continues to sow even though we often place our priorities elsewhere or find excuses not worship God, help out on a ministry team (i.e., committee), tend to the sick, or give back to God a portion of all that God has abundantly entrusted to us. Yet, thankfully, God continues to sow the love and life of the word made flesh, Jesus Christ, into our hearts and then sends us out to sow seeds of his love, forgiveness, grace, and mercy.

Instead of perceiving the absurdity of spreading seed on rocky soil or a dusty old path what if we envisioned the possibility and potential of that one seed getting through the cracks and crevices and somehow finding a place to take root and grow abundantly bearing fruit we could never imagine. What if we continue to hope, season after season, that our work is in the hands of the great Sower who walks alongside us in turning the soil, scattering the seed, and trusting it will take root despite all the forces in the world that attempt to thwart it’s growth.

ⁱ Matt Skinner, “At Work in the Fields of the Lord”; <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5442>