

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

¹³That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: “**Listen!** A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears **listen!**”
¹⁸“Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

God of life, by the power of your Spirit come to us now. Break open our hearts with your living Word so that we may become the fertile soil of your abundant love. Amen.

“He told them many things in parables.” Parables are meant to disturb the status quo. They are designed to stop us in our tracks and turn us around. “What’d he say?”

In our lesson today Jesus was speaking to a crowd of Galileans. They were mostly peasants; fisherman and farmers who struggled to eke out a living. They didn’t have a Hannaford or a Shaw’s down the road, so they had to grow their own food. The seeds they sowed were precious, and so was the yield.

So can we imagine their reaction to Jesus’ parable of the sower? A sower went out to sow and some seed fell on the path...”What’d he say?” “Are you kidding, who throws seed on the path? What a waste!”

And some seed fell on rocky soil...”Good Lord, what’s he thinking! Some seed fell among thorns...”The man’s crazy; doesn’t he know anything about planting a crop?”

In this way Jesus captured their attention. His teachings used images with which the people could identify. In this case he used agricultural images, but Jesus wasn’t talking about farming; he was talking about God. But if Jesus had talked openly about God, the religious leaders would run him out.

Jesus was talking about our God who is generous beyond our human ability to understand. God sows and showers grace with wild abandon. God’s love is unconditional; it doesn’t matter if we are good soil, rocky soil, thorn choked soil, or hard-packed path soil, God loves us just the same. And God forgives us no matter what; sometimes we don’t even have to ask!

To our ears, this doesn’t make sense; it’s wasteful. To human ears it doesn’t seem fair; how can *everyone* deserve God’s generosity? After all, *we* know for sure that some people don’t deserve it. We know for sure, right? The religious leaders thought so.

But we can’t know enough to judge anybody, because we’re not God, and we don’t fully know the heart of God! Until we know the *end* of the story, we cannot truly know the depth and breadth of God’s grace, love and forgiveness.

But we do have *this* story. A sower went out to sow...and sowed *everywhere*. We are inclined to call it “reckless sowing.” But we must pry our ears open to hear that the sower sowed *everywhere*. Which means that God sows the Word of life upon *all people*. The grace and love and forgiveness of God is sown upon all, just as the rain falls on the saint and the sinner, and just as the sun shines on the good and the bad together.

This is hard to hear because we like to judge, and we like to rank ourselves against others, and we like to put people in boxes as if to say, “we know what kind of people they are.” Then we can feel good about ourselves with our moral superiority.

Sad to say, our moral superiority finds us keeping company with the likes of the older brother, and we won't be going to the party God throws for the prodigal son, who at least was honest enough to admit who he was.

God is outrageously generous and I suspect we find it hard to accept that from our human, earthly, materialistic vantage point. Especially when we know we have not been the good soil much of the time, and knowing that we have not always received the good news of God's Word of life with eager faithfulness.

While I have earnestly worked at being good soil myself, I know I have often failed and fallen away. I have been distracted by selfish cares and concerns. My eagerness to receive God's Word has, many times, been shallow with no endurance. There are times when my heart is closed and hard like a well worn path. Of course, I have seen growth in myself...there's hope for me...*and for all of us*...thank God! The key I've discovered is generosity.

The parable of the sower reminds us of how we miss opportunities to receive God's blessing when we're too focused on ourselves. It reminds us that we are all invited to look beyond ourselves and model God's generosity in our lives.

Still, God's model of generosity is challenging. We live in a culture that promotes the idea of scarcity as a way to encourage consumption; "Get your special edition widget while they last. Limited time offer; only \$19.95." Heaven forbid that we would be the only one without a special edition widget!

I may have mentioned this before: In my late teens I worked at a local supermarket. A rumor got started that there was going to be a toilet paper shortage. Sure enough, people got scared and emptied the shelves. Then there was a shortage; for those who got there too late that is.

I believe we must start with faith. Does it not then take faith to model God's generosity; faith that God does indeed care for us? If God cares for the lilies of the field and the little sparrow, how much more must God care for us? God has given us all we need.

Our Mission Committee has learned that in being faithful to its work it experiences something like the feeding of the 5000; they pass on what they have in service to others, and there's always more available for someone else.

Holy generosity doesn't count the cost, because *it is the joy of giving* that can feed 5000 people on 5 loaves and 2 fish. It is the joy of giving that joins our hearts with God's heart. It is the joy of giving that turned over 100 gallons of water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

It is the joy of giving that transforms our lives and expands our world with new life. Generosity is the secret of life. Generosity is like a spring of eternal life that just keeps gushing over. Unfortunately, generosity still doesn't make sense in our material world. And can joy ever be found in what we possess?

Fortunately we can experience the joy of generosity in small steps. I know people who live on fixed incomes and carefully plan their generosity. They don't have much, but they do have joy. And I think you'll agree that joy is priceless.

I would be remiss if I didn't encourage us all to another experience of joy, and that is the experience of sowing some seeds ourselves. The Gospel good news and the love of Christ is something we can all share. There are plenty of souls out there who could use a little love, a good word, or a blessing. God is with you, so preach the Gospel at all times, and if you have to, you can use words. Let us be generous to share the joy we've found. God is with us always. Amen.