

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 12, 2026 • 10:30am
Trinity Episcopal Church • New Orleans, LA

The Rev. Lex Breckinridge

Well, good morning, everyone, and welcome to Trinity. I'm Lex Breckenridge, the Interim Rector. What a delight it is to see so many wonderful faces here today.

TEEP Sunday is really a special Sunday for us here at Trinity. And if you're new here, we're so glad to see you. If you've been here before, we hope you'll come back.

So I'll tell you a little bit more about receiving Holy Communion in just a minute, but just know what a joy it is to see everyone here this morning. And I'll bet a lot of you, like me, have heard the parable of the sower more times than you can count. And you know, I almost always hear this parable as being about me.

What about you, right? You hear that parable about, this parable about being, about you, you know, what kind of soil you are. Are you rocky soil? Are you shallow soil? Are you full of thorns? You know, I don't know about you, but I don't often imagine myself as being good soil. I don't often imagine myself as being soil good enough to bear fruit.

But you know, I always hear this parable as being about me. And you know what performance anxiety is? You know, when you're worried about how you're gonna do on a test or something like that? That's how I always feel when I hear this parable. I worry about how I'm gonna perform.

But you know, I did something a little different this week as I prepared for this sermon. I actually listened to the parable. A crowd's gathered around Jesus and what's the first thing he says to them? Listen, listen, listen.

So listen, I did. I listened to somebody else speak this parable more than once. And as I listened to the parable, instead of just reading it or hearing it, the parable began to speak to me in a different way.

So what's the difference between hearing and listening you might wanna know? Well, think about a conversation. When you hear a friend speaking to you, you might be kind of distracted because what your friend is actually saying and you're not listening to, you're busy thinking about what you're gonna say in reply. You know that experience, don't you? Right? You're not really listening.

You know, when you're listening to your friend speak though, you're opening up to the whole person. Beyond the words that are being said, you're opening up to that human being. You're actively listening to the person and not just the words.

It's called active listening. You know, it's a skill we can all develop. It doesn't take anything special.

It just takes listening. So as I listened to this parable and allowed it to speak to me on its own terms, I noticed a few things beyond what kind of soil I was. For one thing, I noticed Jesus' audience.

You know, the people Jesus was talking to. Jesus wasn't talking to me. I showed up 2,000 years later.

Jesus is talking to a group of farmers, subsistence farmers in Palestine 2,000 years ago, a Palestine that was occupied by the Roman Empire. You know, they weren't free people like we are in this country. They were a people under occupation.

Now, these people were skilled at cultivating the soil and the soil in that part of the world wasn't very fertile. And what they had to do though was to cultivate that soil so they could first pay their taxes to the Romans, which were just outrageous. Then they had to pay their taxes to the temple, which was just outrageous.

And what was left over, they could use to feed their families. So they knew how important it was to find the right kind of soil in which to do their planting. So when they hear the story of a sower, meaning a farmer just like them, that's what the, you know, the sower that you just heard about from Deacon Carol.

She's a farmer just like them. When they heard the story of this farmer who scatters his precious seeds everywhere, and I mean everywhere, regardless of the condition or the quality of the soil, they thought to themselves, what a waste. What kind of farmer would do something like that? Well, in my imagination, I do believe that these good practical farmers listened to the parable.

They understood that Jesus was telling them something different. He was telling them something about the nature of the seeds that the sower was spreading, and he was telling them something about the nature of the sower himself. The sower, the sower was spreading the seeds of abundant grace, the seeds of mercy and kindness, the seeds of justice and peace, and they were reminded of their scriptures, the scriptures that predicted that one day the lion was gonna lie down with the lamb, the scriptures that told them that in the person of Jesus the law and the prophets were being fulfilled, and the kingdom of God was in their midst.

It was God who was the sower, and Jesus was telling them something about what that God looked like. That God sowed the seeds of grace and justice and mercy anywhere and everywhere, and why would God do that? Why would God waste the seeds by throwing them someplace that might not be fertile ground? Because for God, for God, the whole of creation, the four corners of the universe, anywhere and everywhere is in God's loving care, not just the fertile places, not just the sweet spots. God cares for the strange and the broken and the foreign places too.

God's care is anywhere and everywhere. Now, that means that God acts in some ways that might seem pretty strange to us. For example, what do you make of a God who tells you to love your enemies? Love your enemies? And then he, that's not, he's not finished.

He says, love your enemies and pray for them. Love the tax collector who's stealing from me, love the Roman soldier who's persecuting me, love the hypocritical religious authorities who extort temple taxes so that they can lead lifestyles of ease and comfort, yeah, you gotta love them. That's a lot to ask, Lord.

Yeah, but you know, I'll bet some of those farmers in that audience might have been sitting on a hillside a few months back when Jesus spoke the words that later came to be called the Sermon on the Mount. If they were listening, actively and deeply listening, they would have experienced Jesus describing what the kingdom of God looks like. And in the kingdom of God, you love your enemies and you pray for them.

Now, let me say that as Christians, we must always stand firmly against any form of injustice and any form of violent aggression. We stand against acts of bigotry and hate. We stand against acts that demonize or marginalize or malign in any way any of God's children.

And that means anybody and everybody. And there are times when that means pushing back against evil, defending the children of God from danger and harm. Don't make any mistake about that.

But when that sort of action comes from a place of a thirst for revenge, a place for retribution, that's a pretty popular word these days, a place of retribution, a place of an eye for an eye. Jesus says, stop, stop, take a step back, take a deep breath and pray for your enemies. So, you know, it really comes back around to our hearts, yours and mine.

Isn't it in our hearts that this faithful sower spreads the seeds of abundant grace, the seeds of justice and mercy, the seeds of compassion and healing? You know, it's the case that sometimes our hearts are ready to receive those seeds and nurture those seeds and grow them. But sometimes we're not. Sometimes we're just not ready.

I mean, my own heart, yeah, and I know here I'm coming back around to my own heart. My own heart is sometimes really fertile ground to grow in God's grace. But you know what, too often my heart is stony ground, not receptive at all to the seeds of grace.

But here's the thing, I can do something about that and so can you. In my case, it's always a matter of the daily practice of prayer. Sitting in silence, having an open mind and an open heart.

You know, that's how I slow down. I slow down. I slow down to hear the still, small voice of God.

I'm able to listen to the word that God is speaking to me in every moment. God is speaking to you in every moment. You just gotta shut up and listen.

Right, shut up and listen. That's what we all have to do. Not thinking about some kind of response or not thinking about what we're gonna ask God to do for us.

You know, too often our prayers are all about what we're asking God to do for us instead of listening to what God's already doing for us. It's what those old St. Benedict, one of my favorite old saints, he called what I'm talking about listening with the ears of the heart. Listening with the ears of the heart.

See, it's that slowing down, slow down and actively listening that lets me not be so reactive to all the junk that's going on in the world. You know, I love our opening prayers for TEEP. There's a lot of junk going on in the world and we're hearing a lot of junk and we're taking in a lot of junk.

You know what? But you don't have to take in all that junk. You can do something about it. You can not be so reactive to all of the junk in the world and not be so reactive, you know, to the little wounds that hurt all of us.

You know, we're all wounded from time to time. Somebody says something mean or nasty to you. It's a wound, but you don't have to live with that.

You don't have to let that define who you are. You don't have to let that wound say that's who you are. Just let it go and pray for that person.

Now, I got a little assignment for you for this afternoon or tomorrow or the next day. It's not homework, I promise you, and I'm not gonna grade your paper. It's just a strong suggestion.

Find a quiet time and a quiet place. Close your eyes and call up in front of your eyes the face of somebody you don't like. Huh? You got a few of those out there, don't you? I sure do.

Now, I'm not supposed to admit that, but I do. Call up the face of somebody you don't like. Could be somebody you know.

You know, like a, I don't know, a teacher or an older brother or sister or a friend or somebody who's just annoying as all get out or a former friend who's let you down. Or it could be somebody you don't know. You know, I don't know, like a politician or somebody who's just awful.

As you see that face, know that you are seeing the face of another child of God, a beloved child of God, just like you are. That person has hurts just like you do. That person has wounds just like you do.

And the behavior of that person that you don't like, that you find so unacceptable, I guarantee you, it comes out of those hurts and those wounds. So the first thing you do is to find the compassion for your own hurts and wounds. Man, we've all got them.

And find the compassion in your own heart for healing those wounds. Give yourself some grace. And then see if you can find compassion for the other person's hurts and wounds.

Pray for them. Pray for you. And you know what? Give thanks to the sower of the seeds of healing and grace and mercy.

And pray for those seeds to fall upon the ones you don't like just like they fall upon you. Now, when you do that, okay, we're not finished our assignment yet. When you do that, check out the condition of the soil of your heart.

You feel some of the rocks breaking up? Do you feel the thorns kind of going away? Is the soil feeling a little deeper, a little richer, a little loamier? You know what loamy soil is? It's really deep, rich soil. That's the soil in your heart that you'll feel when you start praying for that person you don't like very much and praying for yourself. Those seeds of God's mercy and grace are gonna take root and flourish in your heart if you make room for them.

And that's when those seeds just might begin to bear fruit. Listen, a sower went out to sow.

Amen.