

“Seeds”

Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23

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There are many great stories about seeds from around the world. There's the one about the guy who was being chased by a wild animal, came to a cliff, looked over his shoulder, looked down the side of the cliff—saw water below and jumped off, only to see alligators below. He grabbed a branch, looked up, looked down and knew it was certain death either way—looked to the side and could only see a few strawberries growing out of the side of the cliff—what to do? He ate the strawberries. In other words, live life to the very fullest even when death is certain.

Or there's the story about the great leader who was growing old and needed to find the one who would take his place—the one he would teach and mentor. He decided a contest would be appropriate and gave each one young person throughout the nation seeds to plant. He told them all to come back several months later and show him what had been grown. Months past and they all gathered to show their great leader what they had accomplished. There were beautiful plants, luscious green plants, and beautiful flowers of every kind. One young person was so embarrassed. He had tried everything and nothing grew—there wasn't even a weed growing in his pot. The great leader went up and down the rows looking at all these great plants—and finally stopped in front of the young man and his pot of dirt. The young man wanted to hide. Much to his surprise he heard the great leader say, “This one will be your new leader. He is the best choice because he is honest, has integrity and will lead you well for you see I boiled all the seeds, none of the ones I handed out could grow.” A lesson in honesty and integrity.

Then there's Jesus' parable about seeds. (Used in Children's Time) Now, I've done enough gardening to know that it's terribly inefficient to just go out into unprepared ground and throw out some seeds. When our kids were young—upper grade school and into high school we shared a large garden plot with another family. The six of us would go out to our garden plot and carefully prepare the soil---hoeing and raking and getting out all the dirt clods, smoothing the soil. Then we'd carefully take the corner of the hoe and make a line in the dirt the correct depth for that particular seed. Then we'd carefully plant the seeds as far apart as the directions said and water the seeds, cover them up, and water them some more. We'd tend that garden, pulling up weeds, watering and before long we were enjoying our fresh vegetables. One year we didn't get the carrots or the beets in right away and so Orv went out later and put the carrots in and Walt went out later and put the beets in—still as carefully as the rest of the garden except one put the rows in one way and the other the other way so that the beets and the carrots crisscrossed—made for a very unique looking garden. However, we never just took all the seeds, walked into the garden plot and just threw them around. I have seen pictures of long-ago farmers with what looks like a satchel of seeds tossing them sowing them in a field, but even there the soil has been prepared for the seeds.

So, what do we make of this sower who indiscriminately sows these seeds? Well, as so often is the case with Jesus' parables there's more than one way to look at them. First, I believe we need to give God thanks, that God is so indiscriminate that God's love is thrown out to us all—to all of God's creation. Too often this parable has been used to define how an evangelist—one who shares the good news of God's love, should work. That is don't waste your time or effort on the rocks, the path or the weeds. Go straight for the good stuff. But that, in fact misses the point. The farmer in the parable doesn't go straight for the good stuff, the farmer scatters seed everywhere indiscriminately and is grateful when some bears fruit. That's not how farmers or evangelists work. But it is how God works. The dandelion scatters its seeds everywhere; the salmon fertilizes an entire river; the bee goes to every flower.... This is not about selective efficiency, but about God's indiscriminate love. God is not stingy—this parable tells us God is extravagant and generous—only God scatters seed on highways and parking lots, among rocks and swamps.

Another way to look at this parable is the way most of us learned it. We grew up understanding that this story was about different people and their hearts, their beliefs upon hearing the word of the God. We were taught there were those who in their hearts were like the rocks, the paths or the weeds—and because we are

good church going people, we're the ones who are the fertile ground. I would suggest that each of us possess all four kinds of hearts at different times and with different seeds sown, different settings, different life experiences. It means that at some times in my life I am more open to hearing a particular word from God than at another time. We know as preachers there's no way that our message of the day is going to have the same impact on everyone---it may just not be what you need to hear that day, while for someone else it may be exactly what is needed. We preach and then leave it up to God---the Holy Spirit to work within individuals. And when the word is heard, not everyone will react in the same way---sometimes we, as preachers, offer challenges and some hear and respond to the challenges and others don't---but on another day they might. It is as complex as the gift from God of our individuality---we are all, at different times the rocks, the hard path, the weeds and the rich soil. This interpretation helps us be less judgmental of others and more self-aware of where we are on our own spiritual journey.

The third lesson I hear from this text is that we are to be as extravagant and as indiscriminate as the sower in this story. We are to share God's love with everyone, in whatever way we are called to do.

On yesterday's news there was a story about Daylon McLee, a Black man who had been stopped numerous times by the police for no reason. There were parts of town he avoided because he knew he might be stopped. One day he was stopped at a stop light and around the corner he heard a crash. Got out of his car and ran to see what was happening. A police car had crashed and was on fire. A patrolman was trying to get his partner out of the car and it wasn't working. Without thinking Daylon ran to the vehicle and got Jay Hanley out just in time. The two met, hugged and talked. Daylon wishes that we would see each other as Americans, as people not Black, or white or Asian, just as people.

As a community of faith, you do much sowing of the seeds. Your monthly contributions to various organizations, the incredible mask making, the Deacons and others checking on each other, the sign making Friday night and our young people going on a march for justice against racism Saturday, one of the leaders is Siri Kjorlien, others of you who have gone on marches, gone to the prayer tent at 38th and Chicago, and a new SoJO effort working with First Minneapolis, Plymouth Congregational and other churches to support Minneapolis efforts to re-imagine public safety so that those qualified for the various situations police find themselves in are the ones answering that particular call. Your love for God and God's creation is so evident in so many ways---especially during this pandemic time. There is always more to do and you as individuals and as a community of faith who are open to God's guidance will make a difference.

It is up to us to extravagantly and indiscriminately share God's love with this world, just as God has so extravagantly and indiscriminately shared God's love with us every moment of every day of our lives. Seeds---sow them for we never know which ones or when or where they will be fruitful and God needs you. Amen.

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