

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

**The Reckless Sower**  
Rev. Meredith Kemp-Pappan

One of the joys to come out of this pandemic is that people have been making the most of their increased time at home. The proof: their gardens are in full bloom. A casual walk around our neighborhood is a delight for the senses, because almost every house has at least a small patch of flowers dancing in some brightly colored pots. I have never claimed to have a green thumb, but I have kept a cheerful colony of impatiens thriving since early May.

Have you found yourself outside in the yard more often? You are not alone. Garden supply stores report record sales. Seed companies are experiencing a bumper crop of orders.<sup>1</sup> The victory garden is being resurrected, it seems. Farmers to amateur gardeners know that planting assumes a certain amount of risk, for now matter how precise you garden, how thoroughly you weed, nature remains in control.

The sower in today's parable from Jesus, however, embraces the risk of sowing. If you notice, the sower flails her seed about indiscriminately, and without first stopping to plow and prep her fields.. Farmers in Jesus' time did not stop by Menards and rent a tiller. They simply cast the seed and then plow the land . With this scattershot approach, it is no surprise that some seed falls on hard

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<https://www.dispatch.com/homes/20200419/seed-companies-see-sales-spike-amid-pandemic>

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soil , other seed on ground too rocky for good roots, and still other seed among thorns and weeds. Those are the facts of life, and everyone knows it, including Jesus.”<sup>2</sup>

Congregations, do not want to risk planting seeds that are doomed from the beginning. Congregations are continually looking for a guarantee that a new mission focus or program will take root, grow, and flourish. Churches long for Miracle-Gro that will feed, water, and protect their investment. And so they start Sunday School classes or special worship services or mid-week programs, all tailored to the demographics they so carefully studied. A few weeks afterwards, though, anxiety and frustration emerges when the church membership fails to increase or stewardship pledges remain stagnant. “We planted seed!,” the congregation cries, “Where’s the harvest?”

Where’s the harvest? That is the single biggest question haunting our congregations today. Maybe, though, Jesus calls us to focus less on how many bushels we bring in and more on the bushels of seed we sew. One Bible commentary reflects, “In my own ministry I am often tempted to spend my resources— time, energy, hope —trying to coax, cajole, and beg for growth from

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<sup>2</sup> Bartlett, David L.; Taylor, Barbara Brown (2011-05-31). Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 3, Pentecost and Season after Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16) (Kindle Locations 8006-8008). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

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inhospitable places and people. I can also spend much time despairing when the seed does not take root. The sower does not do that. He accepts the reality that some seed, a goodly portion of it, will fall on bad soil, and he keeps sowing . As the next fifteen chapters of Matthew demonstrate, Jesus keeps spreading the word, no matter how dry, rocky, or weed-infested the ground. His followers are called to do so the same.<sup>3</sup>”

Demographics and careful discernment are important and often necessary steps to carry out Christ’s commandment of service. Yet another way we avoid planting the Word of God is through engaging in risk-averse navel-gazing. We are afraid that if we plant seeds, the seeds will not grow, so why bother?

But there are many examples of churches and worshipping communities out there that are sowing seeds extravagantly. Reaching into their satchels, their hands lovingly and faithfully scatter seeds to the wind, not because they expect to be rewarded, but because they love the act of sowing.

When we get trapped in counting bushels, we will be disappointed. When we measure success against our own

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<sup>3</sup> Bartlett, David L.; Taylor, Barbara Brown (2011-05-31). Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 3, Pentecost and Season after Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16) (Kindle Locations 8028-8031). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

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expectations, we almost always will walk away discouraged. And then we begin to have a faith that is risk averse, faith that is grounded in scarcity. Novelist Bebe Moore Campbell writes, “Some of us have that empty-barrel faith. Walking around expecting things to run out. Expecting that there isn’t enough air, enough water. Expecting that someone is going to do you wrong. The God I serve told me to expect the best, that there is enough for everybody.”<sup>4</sup>

The truth is, we are going to plant a lot of seed. Bushel-fuls, in fact. We are going to fling seed to the north and south and the east and the west. And most of that seed is going to dry up or be eaten or choked out by weeds. It happens. But God doesn’t need acres and acres of vibrant seedlings to accomplish God’s will. With even a small seedling or two, God is able to raise up a miraculous harvest. Our job is not to concern ourselves with the yield; our job is to plant seeds. And not plant seeds one by one in carefully-tilled soils—we are to plant seeds like a seven-year-old plants grass seeds in her parent’s yard, with abundance and joy and recklessness. The God we serve tells us to expect the very best, and there is more than enough for everybody. Thanks be to God! Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Bartlett, David L.; Taylor, Barbara Brown (2011-05-31). Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 3, Pentecost and Season after Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16) (Kindle Locations 8039-8041). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.