

“These Seeds are Meant for Sowing”

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Matthew 13: 1-9

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Jesus spent a lot of time on earth teaching, especially about the Kingdom of God -- how things are at the Spirit level. These things are not the easiest for us to understand, so Jesus figured the best way was to tell stories. Very often he said: “The Kingdom of God is like...” “The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed...” “The Kingdom of God is like treasure hidden in a field, or yeast that a woman took and mixed with flour, or a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind.” As we listen carefully to Jesus’ words and as we open ourselves to the Spirit, more and more we can see and feel and experience this Kingdom that is not in a far-off land in a distant time, but is right here with us right now, calling us to live in this new space, this new relationship that is full of life.

In today’s scripture, Jesus told a story about a sower. In this story, a farmer goes out to plant his crop and as he does so he scatters the seed far and wide. Quite a bit of the seed never amounts to anything: it falls on a hard path or on soil that’s too shallow and rocky or among the thorns that choke out the life after it starts to grow.

I’m not a farmer. When I was little, probably 6 or 7, I dreamed of being a farmer’s wife. The reason I dreamed of being a farmer’s wife and not a farmer was that my dad told me that buying a farm is incredibly expensive, and that the best way to become a farmer would be to marry one. So that was my plan. But... it wasn’t God’s plan. (My job is to tend a different kind of garden, and I love it.)

Farming and gardening are very important to God. In the Bible the world begins in a garden, and the first job humans have is to tend the garden. Jesus comes back to life after being killed on a cross on a hill and laid in a tomb in a garden. The Bible ends not in a garden but in a city, the new Jerusalem, but the garden is still there, for a river flows through it, and spanning it is the Tree of Life.



That tree produces fruit all year and the fruit gives healing for the nations.

Don't ever think that caring for creation is just for leftist activists. God loves his living creation, and it is no coincidence that people often feel God's presence most strongly when they are outside in the forest or down at the waterfront. We are still called to care for the earth and to tend it; not to use and abuse it.

But back to the story of the sower. The **seed represents the love of God that is shared with people.** The soil represents people, but for many reasons, even though they are offered a transforming relationship and new life, it doesn't take root, grow or blossom in everyone.

We can get caught up talking about the soil, but what is more interesting than the soil is the sower. **You have to wonder, what's he doing scattering good seed on crappy soil?**

When I lived out west I had a number of ranchers and farmers in my congregation, and they spent a lot of time planning and strategizing. Farming is a very technical science today. Now there's a lot a farmer can't control, like the weather, but what farmers can control they do, no matter how small the detail. They are not going to waste good seed on bad soil, and the farming equipment today helps to make sure that the soil is as perfectly prepared and fertilized as possible so that the seed has the best possible chance to grow. Just like any good business person, a farmer wants the greatest return with the least amount of cost. They don't want to waste time, energy or money. But in the story that Jesus told, the sower doesn't seem to care where he scatters the seed: the road, the thorny patch, the rocky edges and yes, on the fertile soil.

Who is the sower in the story? It's Jesus. He is saying this is what the Kingdom of God is like. The Kingdom of God is not marked by selective efficiency; it's lavish and generous to the point of being wasteful. God's love isn't just for the few. God's abundant life isn't just for the so-called perfect or even just for those who are likely to receive it. It's for everyone. There is something about the way God works that is not so much planned as it is spontaneous and surprising. Why does the sower cast the seed everywhere? In this action you can't help but see a tremendous hope and a sense of **"You never know!"** That's what God is like. **God sees possibility in each of us where we only see problems and improbabilities.** That is grace: life and love that are given even though we don't deserve it and haven't earned it. We who have some of that life and love growing inside us are called to share it. And we are called to share it like the Sower:

indiscriminately, liberally, and with a big heart and an open hand because *you never know*.

We can never know if or when life will spring up, and whether or how it will grow up.



Rev. Robert Schuller used to say: "You can count the number of seeds in an apple, but only God can count the number of apples in a seed."

C.S. Lewis said, "The best thing about Christianity is that nobody could have guessed it." Jesus came to this world to share the word of God and who did he entrust this message to? A few men with no reputation or credentials and who stank like fish. I wouldn't have taken them for good soil, but Jesus spread the word everywhere and some of it took root.

Let me share a story about Michael Wayne Hunter who was put on death row in California in 1983, in San Quentin prison. He'd been on death



row three years when one day, while he was getting ready to spend time exercising, the guard said, "You're going to miss Mother Teresa. She's coming today to see you guys." "Yea, sure," he said. He didn't believe it. He figured the guard was playing some joke. A little later he heard more buzz about it and thought it might be true.

So Michael jogged over to where he saw a bit of a commotion, and on the other side of the security screen was this tiny woman who looked 100 years old.



Yes, it was Mother Teresa. This hardened prisoner wrote about his experience and he said, "You have to understand that, basically, I'm a dead man. I don't have to observe any sort of social convention; and as a result, I can break all the rules, say what I want. But one look at this Nobel Prize winner, this woman so many people view as a living saint, and I was speechless." Incredible warmth and life came from her old but piercing eyes. She smiled at him, blessed a religious medal, and put it in his hands. This murderer who wouldn't have walked voluntarily down the hall to see the

Warden, the Governor, the President, or the Pope, stood before this woman, and all he could say was, "Thank you, Mother Teresa."

At one point during the visit Mother Teresa turned and pointed her hand at the sergeant. "What you do to these men," she told him, "you do to



God." The sergeant's jaw dropped in shock. That day was a turning point in the life of Michael Wayne Hunter. His life changed. Suddenly there was meaning to it. So drastic was the change that a new trial was set. The verdict was guilty on both counts of first degree murder, but a new sentence was given: Life without the possibility of parole—no death row. The prosecution did not seek the death penalty because Mr. Hunter was now a model prisoner and an award-winning writer.

You never know. You never know where the love and the life of God will take root. Mother Theresa, who spent her life in the gutters of Calcutta, understood that radical hope of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus isn't finished. He is alive and continues to offer you real, authentic, abundant life. Something good has been planted in you. My prayer is that you will let that life take root and grow in you. That you will trust in God's goodness and his love for you and that you will believe that God believes in you.

And my prayer is that it won't stop with you, but that you will share the life inside of you with others, because you never know the difference you can make. Your job is not to make the life grow in someone else --- that's God's job. You can't force life or goodness, you can only plant the seeds. You never know how you might change the lives of others, or how those changed lives might affect the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.