

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23; Pentecost 6A; 7/16/17 **Pastor Ellen Schoepf**

I love having an herb garden in the summer so that I can just go out and pick the herbs I need for any recipe. And, I love that time in Spring when it is warm enough to finally plant my herbs. Now, for any of you who garden, you know there are some necessary steps that must be taken before planting. The ground must be prepared. The soil must be mixed with certain kinds of nutrients. Then, you carefully dig the holes so you can place plants exactly where you want them. There is a process one must go through if you want a successful garden, and preparing the soil **is** part of the process and a necessary first step.

Well, that first important step apparently was not on the farmer's mind in the story Jesus shares with us today. Today, we hear Jesus telling the crowd a parable about a farmer who has gone out to sow seed. And, I have to say, this farmer seems quite irresponsible in the way he goes about planting his field. He has a very unusual process for planting, something that makes no sense to our 21st century way of thinking. Truthfully, he seems reckless, careless, extravagant and wasteful as he throws seed everywhere, even in the most unlikely of places. It would appear he simply does not know what he is doing. After all, **we** know farmers and gardeners plan ahead. They plow the field and prepare the soil so it has just the right

pH balance. Then, they inject the seed, irrigate the soil and fertilize. They do **not** just randomly throw seed around and let it fall wherever!

Well, in Jesus' time, randomly throwing seeds on the ground as this strange farmer does was **not** unusual. Actually, Jesus' account of the farmer's process is quite realistic. Unlike modern farmers, first-century farmers would cast seed around all over the place and **then** plow. With this approach, something that seems crazy to us, it is not surprising that some seed would fall on hard soil, other seed on rocky ground, and yet others in the thorns and weeds. This was just the reality of the situation. Everyone knew this and understood the process. So, as Jesus begins to tell the story, I can imagine people in the crowd standing there nodding their heads in agreement as Jesus talks about the way the farmer plants seed.

Jesus was taking an example from everyday life, an example of something everyone understood, and he turned it into a teaching moment about **his** mission and message. In the analogy he uses, he is describing the situation **he** has been facing in his ministry. Jesus has been teaching and proclaiming the good news that the Kingdom of God has broken into this world and is growing. In all of his parables, he is describing that kingdom which is already breaking in upon us, but not yet fully here. However, most of the time the people just do not get it. If you remember

last week's gospel, we heard that Jesus had been misunderstood. In the gospel narrative preceding today's reading, Jesus had faced opposition. His message seemed to be falling on rocky ground. Furthermore, the Pharisees are always wanting to choke out his message. And, we will find that in the passages following today's reading, his message falls on the hard soil of his hometown folks and they will reject him. Jesus' metaphor is very much about **his message** and what is happening in **his** present life.

I think for those of us who have heard the Parable of the Sower so many times, it is very familiar and we tend to think it is about us – about the kind of soil within our hearts as we hear the message of good news. In fact, in the second part of today's reading we hear Jesus explain the parable's meaning, indicating the story is about our **response** to the word of God which has been sown among us. This certainly is one interpretation that has been used and it can be helpful. But, the explanation of the parable as printed in Matthew was **not** part of the original parable. Those verses were added at a later point in time by the gospel writer or the early church. And, while they do offer a valid and helpful interpretation of the story, the truth is this is **not** a story about **us**. It is **not** a story about what kind of soil we have within our hearts. No, it is a story that is **all** about Jesus. It is a story that is **all** about God – all about an amazing God who is

extravagant and wasteful in showing love to a broken **world**, a God who showers the entire world with abundant, amazing grace.

God is this crazy farmer who sows seeds of forgiveness and love in all kinds of places, even the most unlikely of places. God is this strange, wasteful farmer who nurtures those seeds wherever they fall by showering them and drenching them in abundant grace. God is this whacky farmer who blesses those seeds as they grow with the vibrant sunshine of unconditional love and mercy. You see, our God is one who throws seed out, not only on good soil where hearts are ready to be open to the Word. This God wastefully throws seeds of love and grace out on rocky ground where hearts are hard and the seed cannot easily take root, on weed infested ground where hearts are filled with hate and anger, and on sandy ground where the soil of people's hearts just keeps shifting around. And, the most amazing thing happens – some of this seed takes root and produces a great harvest. Yes, some of this seed produces bushels of abundance. Jesus ends the parable with these words, "Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

Commentator, Talitha Arnold, says, "Maybe [this parable] should be called the Hundredfold Harvest. Even if the harvest were only thirtyfold,

this story would end with a miracle. Sevenfold meant a good year for a farmer, and tenfold meant true abundance. Thirtyfold would feed a village for a year and a hundredfold would let the farmer retire to a villa by the Sea of Galilee.” (Talitha Arnold)

This parable of Jesus ends with a miracle when Jesus talks about a hundredfold harvest. It is a story filled with promise. It is all about the abundance we find as children of God, the abundance of a God of love who relentlessly and indiscriminately sows seeds in the most unlikely places as if it were **all** potentially good soil. This God of abundance even sows seed in the messiness of our own hearts. And, in the person of Jesus Christ, this sowing God of abundance gets down and dirty, working the ground, the soil of our being in the messed-up-ness of our lives. Oh yes, this is a God who is so extravagant and wasteful God gets down and dirty to the point of dying on a cross because of abundant love for this world. And, it is **that abundant love and life** we are called to share as we deeply connect with others and allow God to use **us** to wildly sow seeds of forgiveness, grace and love into the lives of others.