

Trusting the Seed

Matthew 13; Isaiah 55

Parable of the Sower

To many of you, the Gospel for today may be very familiar. Even the first line of the story, "A Sower went to sow some seeds," is very familiar. And, even if it isn't familiar, you can tell that Jesus is about to tell us a story, a story that likely has the purpose to make us think, to encourage change, or to do something. In our confirmation classes, Pastor Julie and I teach our young people that these stories are called parables. Parables are stories that end with our response. We become a piece of the story and we often can identify ourselves within it.

Jesus taught people with many such parables, and this one is probably one of the most familiar. Where do you place yourself in this story? I have found that generally when people hear this particular story, they often like to place themselves in the position of the soil. What kind of soil am I? Am I good soil?

Am I rocky soil? Do I hear the word of God and respond in a way that would make me good soil?

And, I can see why we might do that. In fact, I recently did. At one of our beloved saint's committal, I talked about Herb Horlacher as one who had faithful good soil. I used this parable at his committal because Herb was a farmer. He was a milk hauler, but also a farmer and lived on a farm all his life. He would have understood the importance of good soil as all farmers do. It was on that beautiful summer day, overlooking some corn in the distance from the Resthaven cemetery, that it made perfect sense to liken Herb's faith to good soil as the faithful farmer but also faithful follower of Jesus that Herb was.

And, Jesus seems to position the parable in a way that makes us think about ourselves. At first glance anyway. But, I think we often go there because of our tendency towards individualism, the moralism that we humans often grab

onto as if this parable should be about our personal faith rather than about our vocation of faith. Because of that tendency towards individualistic faith, we often are tempted to get comparative. We might even be bold enough to think, "I know I'm good soil because hey, I got up and went to worship today." Or, "At least I'm not rocky soil like that neighbor of mine." You just might be able to see then that this parable can cause us to go the wrong direction by comparing soil to soil.

Another problem with that perspective of comparing soil to soil is the conundrum of agency. What is God's agency in this story? If we ask this question, it would perhaps make it look like God is a sloppy farmer, who throws the seed wherever and if you are the lucky one to land in good soil, well then, you will be good soil. Treating faith as luck, somehow that you will end up faithful because of how the chips fell, or in this case, seed, doesn't seem to match up with the God we know through

Christ. God does not throw dice to see how our faith will be. So, what do we do with all that?

Well, what if we instead place ourselves in this parable, this story, in the position of the sower, the farmer, the one who is to sow seeds in the field? Here in Matthew's Parable of the Sower, Jesus doesn't in fact say that the sower is anyone in particular. He doesn't say this person is himself or his Father in heaven. Perhaps we naturally assume it must be, but Jesus never does say who the sower is. He simply says that a sower went to sow. And, that farmer threw seeds on all sorts of places, as farmers may have in those days.

So, here is what I ask today as we place ourselves in this parable. Today, let's place ourselves as being the sower. What can we learn from that? That would mean that we are the ones who are spreading the word, spreading the seed of God's love out there in the world and within God's church. How would that make this

story different for us? Well, it would make it extremely different, for instead of looking at our soil, our faith, our growth as individuals we are instead look at the fact that we sow faith in others and that we have an impact in other's lives, to help them to grow in good soil. Wow, that sower does more than sow seed. That sower has some responsibility to tend the seed as it grows. That's really wonderful stuff.

First, I'll apply this to my life and then to yours. You know, there are times as a pastor when I wonder what am I trying to do with all this, especially during this pandemic. Sometimes, I look around and I see what we can't do, what obstacles are in the way. I see the struggle of being church. Before the church was in an ever rapidly changing world as it was, and now it is even more! At a time such as this, where there are so many necessary rules and challenges, it can be really easy for me to engage in a concept of scarcity. Wow, here I am wasting all this seed. I'm throwing it around and

nothing is growing because I can't even see where it's going and who it's going to!

But then, I look deeply and there is abundance. God has used that seed to grow faith in other people, even when I can't at first see the effect. Then, suddenly, someone new volunteers to help in a ministry they never did before. Then you get a Facebook post stating someone's child misses church and how great the VBS in a Box was. And then a program springs up where I didn't see it before and worship somehow thrives in all this. Wow...here I was concentrating on the scarcity of the seed, the weeds, the non growth, when right in front of me, there were other instances of abundance.

Now, relate this to your own lives. You go to your vocations, perhaps you are retired or teach your children at home; you raise your kids, grandkids and spend time in your hobbies. Aren't there days when you look around you and you think: "What am I doing? Nothing I do seem to

matter. No matter how hard I try, my kid still fights me on going church, my kids don't respect me like I think they should, and all I see is all this work for a paycheck and nothing to show for it. Why should I even bother throwing all this seed around when all I see is growth that gets choked or doesn't seem to grow at all.

And then, one day your child says, "VBS was fun today", and your colleague at work comes to you and asks you what to do about a difficult marriage, and your boss tells you, "thank you for being such a positive example to others." Suddenly, there was abundance in your faith life you didn't see was there before. The seed you were trying to sow did grow, just not where you were looking.

The thing is my friends; God throws the seed abundantly whether or not we choose to see where it lands. And, there is good soil out there in places where we throw seed, too. It just depends upon where we choose to focus. Are we going to focus upon what we see

isn't happening or on what does happen and is happening? Do we focus on those people who we think don't care about faith, or do we love them and tend them so that they have an abundant example of who the faithful are?

Do we look around and wonder why our grandchildren aren't doing that God stuff like we would want or are we thankful for the grandchildren who are. Do we wonder why people don't volunteer to do much or are we seeing the ones who are even during a pandemic? Do we see a dying institution known as the church or the one that actually is thriving in new and creative ways?

You see, God throws seed abundantly and asks us to do the same. Yet, instead of expecting growth in places we want, perhaps we should be looking at places that surprise us. For God's love is abundant not scarce, just as we continue to sow seed that may be wasted because an abundance is just around the corner.

As many of you know, Jim and I have a dog named Luna. I think God puts dogs in my life because dogs are so useful in placing my priorities in the right perspective. You see, Luna is generally very happy to do just about any activity. She is a dog who has a mindset of abundance instead of scarcity.

I think we could all use a bit of humor about right now, so to make my analogy of scarcity verses abundance clear, I will share with you one of my favorite poems, sort of a poem anyway. It describes how two different animals...or in my opinion, two different people can look at any given situation. To you cat lovers, I apologize but it's meant to be funny so I hope you will take it in stride. But, when you listen to this, think about how you tend to think about your life. Do you live a life of abundance or scarcity?

EXCERPTS FROM A DOG'S DIARY: **Day number 180**

8:00 am - OH BOY! DOG FOOD! MY FAVORITE!
9:30 am - OH BOY! A CAR

RIDE! MY FAVORITE!
9:40 am - OH BOY! A WALK! MY FAVORITE!
10:30 am - OH BOY! A CAR RIDE! MY FAVORITE!
11:30 am - OH BOY! DOG FOOD! MY FAVORITE!
12:00 noon - OH BOY! THE KIDS! MY FAVORITE!
1:00 pm OH BOY! THE YARD! MY FAVORITE!
4:00 pm - OH BOY! THE KIDS! MY FAVORITE!
5:00 PM - OH BOY! DOG FOOD! MY FAVORITE!
5:30 PM - OH BOY! MOM! MY FAVORITE!

Day number 181

8:00 am - OH BOY! DOG FOOD! MY FAVORITE!
9:30 am - OH BOY! A CAR RIDE! MY FAVORITE!
9:40 am - OH BOY! A WALK! MY FAVORITE!
10:30 am - OH BOY! A CAR RIDE! MY FAVORITE!
11:30 am - OH BOY! DOG FOOD! MY FAVORITE!
12:00 noon - OH BOY! THE KIDS! MY FAVORITE!
1:00 pm OH BOY! THE YARD! MY FAVORITE!
1:30 pm - ooooooo. bath. bummer.
4:00 pm - OH BOY! THE

KIDS! MY FAVORITE!
5:00 PM - OH BOY! DOG
FOOD! MY FAVORITE!
5:30 PM - OH BOY! MOM!
MY FAVORITE
EXCERPTS FROM A CAT'S
DIARY: **DAY 752** - My captors
continue to taunt me with
bizarre little dangling objects.
They dine lavishly on fresh
meat, while I am forced to eat
dry cereal. The only thing that
keeps me going is the hope of
escape, and the mild
satisfaction I get from ruining
the occasional piece of
furniture...Tomorrow I may
eat another houseplant.

DAY 761 - Today my
attempt to kill my captors by
weaving around their feet
while they were walking
almost succeeded, must try
this at the top of the stairs. In
an attempt to disgust and
repulse these vile oppressors, I
once again induced myself to
vomit on their favorite
chair...must try this on their
bed.

DAY 774 - I am
convinced the other captives
are flunkies and maybe
snitches. The dog is routinely
released and seems more than

happy to return. He is
obviously a half-wit. The bird
on the other hand has got to
be an informant, and he
speaks with them regularly. I
am certain he reports my
activities. Due to his current
placement in the metal room
his safety is assured. But I can
wait, it is only a matter of
time...

We, all of us, are called
to be sowers of seed. We sow
the seeds of the word and of
faith. We also have the choice
to despair upon the seed that
does not grow or rejoice in the
seed that does. God's
abundance is already there for
us to see, to support, and to
grow. Where are you seeing it
grow today? Those signs of
goodness are everywhere
because we have a God who
will never give up on us.

May we continue to trust that
the seed will be what it needs
to be. Amen.