

Laura Robinson
Bethel UCC
July 12, 2020
Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23

“The Impractical Sower”

Will you pray with me?

Gracious God – you of abundant love – pour out your Spirit on us gathered here today. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all these gathered hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

The Parable of the Sower.

It’s a famous one.

Perhaps some of us can picture the ways we were taught this story as children.

I remember distinctly some kind of version with gnarly looking thorns coming up and swallowing the little plant start. Though, I may have that mixed up with Sleeping Beauty’s castle, come to think of it.

It’s so easy for us – for me anyway – to hear the words of this old and well-known parable and think immediately I have it all figured out.

Clearly, the purpose of this story is get me to ponder and reflect upon what kind of soil I am.

What kind of soil YOU are.

What kind of soil Beth’el as a collective is.

Clearly, this parable is meant as an object lesson to help us see how far we need to go, how much better we need to be, so that we can be “good” soil.

OBVIOUSLY what Jesus means for us to focus on in this story is ourselves.

But what if that sort of misses the mark?

What if actually it completely misses the mark altogether?

Because what if what we’re actually supposed to hear in this parable is a story of a God so unconcerned with finding the RIGHT soil that this God just scatters seed every which way – happy to have it land anywhere and everywhere.

What if, in this parable of the sower, we're actually supposed to focus on the sower?

What's the story mean, then?

As many of you know, my previous call was in Des Moines, IA.

Now Des Moines is a city – not a vast array of cornfields, but it doesn't take that long driving from the city to make it out into those Fields of Dreams.

One of the members at my church thought I could not spend two years in Iowa without witnessing a corn harvest – and experiencing the feel of the combine.

It is a unique experience to be sure.

Combines these days are huge. Once seated – you're up 15, 20 feet in the air – looking out over the tops of neat rows of corns for ages.

Did you know those things have GPS programmed into them so you know exactly the row of corn you're in? Sensors so that when you line it up for seeding or harvesting, the process is exact and perfect?

No seed wasted. No head of corn left behind.

It's perfect.

It's an example of human ingenuity and practicality.

Any self-respecting farmer only plants in good soil. With ample water and sunlight. And in neat little rows that maximize productivity.

It's what makes sense.

Imagine a farmer walking along – throwing seeds up in the air – letting them fall wherever they will. It's impractical.

Lucky for us – it seems God is nothing like a pre-programmed corn combine.

God is impractical.

And in a world that strives to be practical, efficient, and runs to jump to conclusions before we even know much of anything about something – it is a relief, at least to me, to realize that God might in fact be different.

No land, no space left untouched – God comes through scattering seeds that will end up feeding the birds, seeds that will wither at the first hint of tough times, seeds that won't even consider sprouting.

God doesn't pick and choose the right soil for Her word – She scatters it everywhere.

Ingenious in Her own way that we mostly don't understand, God is an extravagant and impractical sower.

Thank goodness for that.

Because I'm not sure I'd make it into the good soil category.

I spent some time this week wallowing around in reflection about what kind of soil I might be.

If you're anything like me – you're probably pretty hard on yourself.

Though you read this parable and went – yup – good soil – that's me! What IS your secret?

Birds scooping up God's word before it even has a chance to settle in me? Sure. Seeds that struggle in a shallow soil? That shoot up quickly only to wither away at the first sign of too much sun? That sounds about right.

Seeds choked – distracted – by the thorns of the world? Yup – that hits home too.

Seeds that bear fruit of the spirit – beautiful, rich fruit? Hm... I mean, maybe if I try harder.

But here's the thing about this parable – here's the thing about our God – it doesn't matter if you aren't quite perfect all the time.

God sows in you anyway.

It doesn't matter if the world's getting you down, if you're feeling exhausted and angry and defensive – God sows in you anyway.

With our impractical sower God – no seed is lost, no seed is wasted, because nothing and no one is unworthy.

That's God's nature.

Humans? We're not so extravagant with each other.

How quick are we to write one another off?

To learn one detail and write the rest of the story before hearing another word?

When we learn where someone grew up... or one detail from their past... when we see the color of their skin... or learn who they voted for... we write the rest of the story.

Not only the story of what has come before, but more importantly the story was what is to come.

We don't even bother sowing the seeds of relationship, because why waste our time? We know exactly where they'll end up.

Fear and judgment and making assumptions are programmed into our internal GPS. It's a reflex to make a snap decision about whether or not someone is worthy of our time.

Of our love.

Of our compassion.

And too often, we decide those gifts – love, compassion, patience – are in limited supply and can only be expended on those we decide have the right soil.

But luckily, luckily – God knows different.

God knows there is no limit on love. On compassion. On curiosity and openness.

And so God sows. In all the worst places.

In all those places we've written off – the inner cities, the rural south, the prisons, the boardrooms.

Into our own lives – our families, our spirits...

God goes.

Laughing and rejoicing in the joy of unexpected outcomes.

A rose growing up from the concrete.

A tired and hardened heart finding a way to soften again.

God rejoices in the most unlikely of harvests.

For they were never unlikely for Her.

It is said God's grace requires a response.

I think it does. And maybe it looks like reflecting a bit on what kind of soil you're nurturing.

Responding to the Word of God in your life may ask us to look at ourselves honestly, gently and lovingly.

It may ask us how we might make some space for the Word of God – for God's Spirit – to take root in our lives.

It may also mean that we are tad bit more careful about assuming we know exactly what kind of soil our neighbor is working with.

Never forget, our response is just that. A response. A response to God's love extended to us.

The sower is still out there – sowing away – in all the wrong places.

Unconcerned with conventional farming wisdom or efficient strategies for maximum reward.

Concerned only with extravagant, bountiful hope.

God is out there making unruly, messy, delightfully overgrown gardens – just watch – one in taking root in you.

Amen.