

## *Flinging Seeds*

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Telling stories is part of our DNA. Human beings are the product of our stories, and our lives are all story journeys.

At their deepest level, our stories are given meaning, empowered by being connected with God's story.

Jesus was a master storyteller.

He uses the everyday stuff of Palestinian life...water, sun, seeds, earth, coins, brooms, sheep, fathers, sons, parties, vineyards...to open us up to the mystery of God's realm in the everyday. Even now, Jesus' parables startle us from complacency and encourage us to become partners in an embodied love that seeks to topple unjust systems and oppressive practices.

This morning we'll read the parable of the sower from Matthew's gospel. For you kids out there unfamiliar with the term, to sow is to plant. In Jesus' day, a farmer would carry a bag with seeds inside over a shoulder. He would take these seeds and scatter them with his hands.

### *The Parable of the Sower*

*13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. <sup>2</sup> Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach.*

*<sup>3</sup> And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. <sup>5</sup> Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup> Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup> Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup> Let anyone with ears listen!"*

*(At this point in the text, the disciples ask Jesus to tell them what he's really saying. Jesus says that, as disciples, they have a special way to understand him, so Jesus explains the story like this...) **Matthew 13:18-23** --*

*<sup>18</sup> "Hear then the parable of the sower. <sup>19</sup> When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. <sup>20</sup> As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup> yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. <sup>22</sup> As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. <sup>23</sup> But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."*

*So ends the reading and may God add a blessing to our understanding.*

*Let us pray: Eternal God, may these ancient words be seeds of faith and love in our lives as we seek to be your people. AMEN*

As we were preparing to move to Minnesota from the Chicago suburbs, a gardener friend told me that Minnesota had the very best soil in the world. When she lived here, her garden thrived – good, rich dirt she said, that produced delicious vegetables and colorful flowers. With the exception of the summer of my itty-bitty pizza garden with a yield of 10 cherry tomatoes and basil that went to flower, I have not grown, but happily consumed, the bounty that Minnesota yields. Indeed, it is wonderful.

My friend's comment about good soil came to me this week as I've thought about Jesus' parable of the sower.

At the time of this storytelling, Jesus' ministry was both making people in powerful positions uncomfortable, even as he was building new community. Those who followed him were letting go of old ways of believing and thinking

to be part of his movement – something that could pose a threat to the old social and religious order.

When I read a parable, I always wonder -- what could make anyone uncomfortable in this story?

Maybe the disciples, who received the inside scoop on the story, squirmed as they tried to figure out which “soil” they were...am I good soil? Rocky? Thorny? This is certainly a good practice for our own lives. Jesus’ explanation isn’t intended to be used to weaponize others or judge people who do not believe as we do. I don’t think Jesus intends this soil teaching to be a source of guilt or shame.

We are all types of soil, really. Our particular stage of life, our context and circumstance effects our receptivity to God’s Word. There are myriad ways that God’s voice and truth can get choked out or diminished – it happens in the face of self-doubt, betrayal, work obligations, addictions, limited imagination, apathy, or exhaustion. And then there are other times when God just speaks so clearly that we heed the clarion call. I want to talk about weeds, thorns, rocks and good soil, but not today.

Today I want to focus on the one who tosses the seeds.

Jesus’ sower doesn’t act as any gardener I have ever known. Instead of planting the seeds in careful, measured, straight rows, spaced precisely to allow for root and leaf expansion...the farmer flings seeds, lavishly, wastefully, willy nilly in every which direction. In Jesus’ day, seeds were life (the Cub or farmer’s market wasn’t a short trip down the street). You would never waste seeds that could sustain life.

If we can imagine God as the sower in the story, Jesus illustrates God’s ways of unfettered generosity, non-stop love and unending grace. This is not a small, rule-keeping, judgmental God whom we can safely keep in a box.

Jesus affirms that God’s goodness, the seeds of the kin-dom of hope, justice, equality, love and peace cannot be contained or prescribed by us humans. God

flings seeds of mercy and love and grace on everyone and everything...even those *I* may not feel deserve it. Ouch.

And this is the source of discomfort.

Jesus' God challenges and disturbs because understanding God this way pushes us to see beyond our small, limited lens of scarcity and discouragement to the reality of God's abundance, and imagining a different sort of future.

This is good news in this time when the soil beneath our feet is rocky with brutality, racism, hatred, and conflict ... thorny with stress, illness, and unrest. Jesus reminds us that even -- or maybe especially -- in this soil of July 2020, God can do more than we can ever imagine or ask. This is a narrative of hope in the midst of despair.

Jesus' love dismantles the tiny kingdoms that we have built around power, success and self-interest. It reconstructs something new. Something that challenges the status quo and transforms us with love from the inside out. This kind of love creates new community which is God's good pleasure to give.

I want to close by sharing some writing by my favorite author, Barbara Brown Taylor, who re-writes the story of the Sower. This little story touched my heart this week and I hope it does yours. She writes,

*Once upon a time, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came along and devoured them. So he put his seed pouch down and spent the next hour or so stringing aluminum foil all around his field. He put up a fake owl he ordered from a garden catalog and, as an afterthought, he hung a couple of traps for the Japanese beetles.*

*Then he returned to his sowing, but he noticed some of the seeds were falling on rocky ground, so he put his seed pouch down again and went to fetch his wheelbarrow and shovel. A couple of hours later he had dug up the rocks and was trying to think of something useful he could do with them when he remembered his sowing and got back to it, but as soon as he did he ran right into a briar patch that was sure to strangle his little seedlings. So he put his pouch down again and looked everywhere for the weed poison but finally decided just*

*to pull the thorns up by hand, which meant he had to go back inside and look everywhere for his gloves.*

*Now by the time he had the briars cleared it was getting dark, so the sower picked up his pouch and his tools and decided to call it a day. That night he fell asleep in his chair reading a seed catalog, and when he woke the next morning he walked out into this field and found a big crow sitting on his fake owl. He found rocks he had not found the day before and he found new little leaves on the roots of the briars that had broken off in his hands. The sower considered all this, pushing his cap back on his head, and then he did a strange thing: He began to laugh, just a chuckle at first and then a full-fledged guffaw that turned into a wheeze at the end when his wind ran out.*

*Still laughing and wheezing he went after his seed pouch and began flinging seeds everywhere: into the roots of trees, onto the roof of his house, across all his fences and into his neighbors' fields. He shook seeds at his cows and offered a handful to the dog; he even tossed a fistful into the creek, thinking they might take root downstream somewhere. The more he sowed, the more he seemed to have. None of it made any sense to him, but for once that did not seem to matter, and he had to admit that he had never been happier in all his life.*

(Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Seeds of Heaven* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), pp. 28-29.

God continues to toss out the seeds of love, hope, persistence, inclusion, resistance, justice, mercy and dare I say it... joy, with abandon. God is always making a way when there is no way, always giving growth. We are not alone in the struggle in this good Minnesota soil.

Thanks be to God. AMEN