

Sowing Seed Generously  
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Let us pray

Lord, we welcome you. Open our hearts to your Word for us today. Amen.

Narrator: A farmer, ragged and barefooted, was standing on the steps of his raggedy shack. A stranger stopped for a drink of water and he asked:

Stranger: "How is your cotton coming along?"

Farmer: "Ain't got any."

Stranger: "Did you plant any?"

Farmer: "Nope, afraid of boll weevils."

Stranger: "Well, how is your corn?"

Farmer: "Didn't plant any, afraid there would be no rain."

Stranger: "Well, how are your potatoes?"

Farmer: "Ain't got any, scared of the potato bugs."

Stranger: "Really, what *did* you plant?"

Farmer: "Nothing, I just played it safe."

Stranger: "How safe is it to not have any crops at all?" (Thanks to Rev. Liz Edwards, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.)

Narrator: Two disciples walked away from church having just heard a message about sharing God's

Word. They decided to meet for lunch at the end of the week. The waitress heard this conversation:

1: Did you talk to anyone about God this week?

2: Nope. I was afraid people'd think I was judging them.

1: Well did you share with anyone about how your faith helps you through the week?

2: No. I was afraid they'd think I was weak leaning on Jesus.

1: Well did you say anything about the things you like at church, like the worship team or the great people?

2: No. I didn't want to sound like I was putting down anyone else's church.

1: Well did you say anything about our church backpack program and see if they wanted to help?

2: No. I was afraid they'd think I was asking for money.

1: Are you going to church this week?

2: Sure. I wouldn't miss it. It lifts me up and encourages me.

1: And you don't think others might like to be lifted up and encouraged?

2: Sure, but I'm afraid that...

Narrator: Sounds like there will be no harvest.

Aren't we like that? We spend so much time calculating the chances of our success and the possible objections of others or the possible outcomes that we fail to speak the wonderful, life giving, grace filled words about Jesus' love for all people. We don't even give the other person a chance. We try to determine the richness of the soil before we speak. What if we, like the Sower, simply cast the seed broadly?

The Parable of the Sower is most often studied for the discussion of the soil the seed falls upon. Perhaps it should be called the Parable of the Four Soils.

The seed that falls on the hard packed path is gobbled up by birds. Jesus said, **“When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart.”** (Verse 19) Sometimes the Word of God is heard but there is no one willing to explain it, or the person never connects with other believers and has no opportunity to ask questions, or perhaps doesn't have a Bible to turn to or a study to attend. For whatever reason, the Word is not understood and the enemy, who does not want us to turn to God, steals away the message before the person can grasp what a wonderful gift they almost had.

Jesus explained the seed that fell on the rocky ground as, **“Someone who hears the Word**

**and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.”** (Verses 20-21)

Sometimes the hearer is excited about this great news and God's amazing acceptance and love, but then life happens. A friend mocks them for choosing to go to church over the golf game or the boss laughs when the person asks not to work on Sunday morning, and because the person's understanding of the Word has not grown deep roots, the enthusiasm dies away and the person forgets their momentary joy.

Jesus then explains, **“The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.”** (Verse 22) This is like the person who goes on a great spiritual retreat and accepts God's love and then returns to the daily grind. They return with good intentions. They are going to worship regularly, read God's word daily using daily devotions, and spend time in prayer. They are even going to seek out a small group to hold them accountable to this new beautiful way of life.

And then life happens. That unfinished project has to be worked on even after work hours. Or they have the opportunity for a promotion and greater income, but it'll mean more hours. Or they

look at their credit card debt, or the something special they've talked about buying, and just can't take the time to grow in their new relationship with God.

But the seed that falls on good soil yields a crop far greater than what was sown (Verse 23). This is the Word that was truly taken to heart. It was both heard and understood - and acted upon. This is why, following the reading of the scripture passage we say, "May God bless the reading, understanding, and doing of his Word."

Is the message about the soil important for us? Absolutely. Or at least, absolutely, if your desire is to grow in your faith and your relationship with God and grow to be all God created you to be. And I encourage you to ponder the state of your soil and consider what you are doing, or not doing, to tend to your soil. How is your receptivity and response to God's Love?

However, for the moment I want you to consider a different aspect of this parable. Let's consider the Sower. It *is* called the Parable of the Sower.

This Sower seems amazingly careless. He is casting the seed about without caution. He isn't worried about the fate of each seed. He's just getting it out there. Some lands on the rocky soil. He doesn't get down on his hands and knees and

reclaim each of the potentially harvest producing seeds. He just goes on.

Some of the seed lands on the packed earth of the path. Again he doesn't so much as try to sweep it off into the better soil. Some falls where the thorny weeds rule. Well, he certainly wouldn't want to reach in among the thorns to reclaim the seed.

He throws the seed with amazing abandon. Why doesn't he walk along, bent down low, making sure that each seed reaches the best soil? Isn't it a terrible waste to just toss the seed out, letting it fall where it may, and even be carried off in the wind?

Apparently the Sower is confident that there will be a harvest in spite of the losses. He simply keeps sowing his seed, believing that growth will come.

This seed, remember, represents God's Word. How is the Sower of the seed like Jesus with God's Word?

Jesus, as we know was exceedingly careful about sharing God's Word. He shared when he knew he was in the company of believers. Usually this was in synagogues. If unbelievers happened upon the group, Jesus quickly changed the subject so they would not overhear the Word being shared.

Every time Jesus met someone, he carefully, through devious questioning and conversation,

determined if the person was receptive to his message before he shared about God's Kingdom. He had his team of closest followers make sure that random people did not make it into the crowd or that they not get too close so as to hear Jesus' teaching.

Jesus especially avoided those who were different, those who weren't part of the elite God focused Jewish people. And the poor and those who were ill were kept away from God's Word, too. What would happen to their special group if just anyone came in?

Ok. Had enough of that nonsense? That isn't how Jesus served at all. He was not cautious about where he preached or on whom he invested his time. He went to the most unlikely places, allowed himself to be interrupted by inconsequential people, like women, and the deformed, and the Samaritan, and the outcast.

Jesus shared the Word of the Kingdom of God with everyone. He shared with the Pharisees even though they thought he was possessed. Hear these verses, **“Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, “Could this be the Son of David?”**

**“But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of**

**demons, that this fellow drives out demons.”**  
(Matt. 12:22-24)

Jesus shared the Word with his disciples, even when they did not understand. When he told them that he, **“must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”** (Matt. 16:21-22)

Jesus shared God's Word with a rich man who asked how to inherit eternal life, and even though the man asked, he could not imagine giving up his wealth (remember the thorns that choked the seed?). Jesus answered, **“If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”** (Matt. 19:21)

Jesus was awfully radical. We really wouldn't want to be like him, would we? He shared God's Word with everyone. He crossed cultural barriers, ethnic barriers, gender barriers, economic barriers, and dare I say, political barriers, and denominational barriers.

Hmm...I don't know about this. Surely we should draw the line somewhere! Otherwise how can we control who might come worship with us?

What if *their* lifestyles don't fit with our expectations? Could we trust God with that? What if *their* behavior doesn't fit our norm? Could we trust God with that? What if *their* particular beliefs about the interpretation of the Bible don't line up exactly with ours, could we trust God with that? What if *their* appearance isn't as appropriate as we thought church appearance had to be, could we trust God with that?

Jesus came speaking grace filled words to all. And he didn't carefully calculate the potential for success before sharing. He simply followed God's instructions to share and love regardless of the receptivity of the person.

And God, in his infinite wisdom, (really, God?) commanded *us* to go and do likewise. Go out into the world, all the world. Don't forget the commission began with where you live and then extends to the next communities and the next, and we are to share all that Jesus taught.

Hear these words, **“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”** (Matthew 28:19-20)

Do you know why God trusts us with this call? God knows it isn't our job to convert the

person. Only God can do that. Only the Holy Spirit can change a heart. He isn't asking us to do what he does. He is asking us to do what we can do, and do well. We can share what Jesus taught. We can share what our faith means to us. We can share why we like to help others. We can share why we have hope in this crazy world. We can share why our relationship with God is important. We can share how worship in a community uplifts and encourages us.

We can talk about God's unconditional love and unlimited grace, even for us who don't have it all together and that is so amazing we even want to hang out together in something we call 'church.' We can share about Jesus' faithful actions in our lives. We can share where, often with hindsight, we see God's hand was leading and guiding us into better choices and a better way of looking at this life. We can share the hope we have of reuniting with our loved ones in heaven. We can share how awesome it is to be forgiven of our blunders.

We can share generously everywhere and trust God to take care of the seed. We are not the One who converts. We simply cast the seed.

And, by the way, that means we'll need to be tolerant and loving to all God gathers into our body while God disciples them into the life he has for them, just as he is still trying to disciple us into

loving people who welcome, not criticize, those he brings into our midst.

So we don't have to worry about all the stuff we worry about and 'what if' this thing to death. That is too often what happens. We literally 'what if' our sharing to death – and we do nothing.

**“Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear.”** (Matthew 13:8) God's Word is incredibly fruitful, and a great harvest is guaranteed – *if* we do our part.

We can trust God with His part. Can he trust us with our part?

Let us pray

Lord, forgive us when we over analyze and allow fear to prevent us from spreading your Word. Help us to boldly spread seed broadly and trust you with the harvest. Help us to be faithful in doing our part in growing your Kingdom. Amen.