

**SCRIPTURE READINGS**

**Isaiah 55:10-13**

**Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23**

**Ridiculously Lavish**

A sower went to sow some seeds and as he sowed some seeds some fell on the path and others fell on the rocks, while others fell where there wasn't much dirt and other fell among thorns, and finally some fell on the good soil.

Whenever I read this passage I recall my dad kneeling down in the dirt with me as a little girl handing me a couple seeds telling me where to poke a hole in the dirt and plant them. It was a very orderly process. Nothing full of abandon like the sowing of seeds in this passage. This farmer seems rather careless.

But like every parable Jesus tells it is more of a riddle than anything. We are supposed to be a bit startled by what at first appears to be just an ordinary story. The parable of the sower is a familiar one to most of us. In fact as soon as I read it I start envisioning us acting out this scene in "Godspell," when I had time for things like musical theatre. I can see one actor falling to the ground like the seed only to very quickly be attacked by a hungry crow. Next the other was covered up with rocks. I happened to be the seed cast among the thorns and my cast mates cackled as they choked the life out of me. I fought the death hard but the thorns won in the end. And then of course the most beautiful cast member happened to be the seed who fell on the good soil and she danced a gleeful dance as the audience celebrated her life with her.

As I think back on that scene and read this parable I fight a guilt response. I start worrying about what kind of ground I am on with God. I wonder how many birds are in my field, how many rocks, how many thorns. I wonder what I need to do to clean them all up. I wonder how I will become the perfect seed falling on the fertile ground.<sup>1</sup> I see that the odds are not in my favor. How dare I think I'm a good seed in strong soil? But quickly I am reminded that actually I don't think this parable is about us very much at all. I think the parable is less about the seed and the ground and a whole lot more about the sower.

If we understand the sower to represent God. I am pretty convinced The Creator knows how to plant a seed effectively. But I also believe God is about growth and possibility in every time and place.

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Barbara Brown "Seeds of Heaven" pg. 26

Think about the other parables of Matthew that you know. The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast are about abundance. Matthew also tells us that the Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, and fine pearls and a net thrown into the sea that catches fish of every kind. God is about abundance.

If this parable is about the sower and not about the different kinds of ground then the focus is no longer on our shortfalls but rather on the generosity of our maker, “the prolific sower who does not obsess about the condition of the fields, who is not stingy with the seed but who casts it everywhere, on good soil and bad, who is not cautious or judgmental or even very practical, but who seems willing to keep reaching into his seed bag for all eternity, covering the whole creation with the fertile seed of his truth.”<sup>2</sup>

I think this parable is about a God who believes growth can and will happen as long as She never gives up. Even in those rugged places seeds were sown and in almost every situation they also grew. And once they were able to get their roots down they flourished and the harvest that was yielded was an unbelievable amount. The amount that Jesus says this soil produced would be like saying one tomato plant produced one hundred large tomatoes.

The holy plants seeds longing for growth. God scatters grace and love everywhere. God knows what the ground is like, and knows how we see the world around us and yet that does not stop him from showering blessings upon us. She isn't selective like that.

Unlike us God doesn't look at certain people and see potential and others and see no hope. The creator plants possibilities for growth in everyone. Some will have ears to hear and others will choose not to listen. Even Jesus says that as he speaks this parable. “Listen” he says. “If you have ears to hear then Listen” Dan Chambers wrote. “Hearing a great sermon depends as much upon the one listening as it does on the one speaking. Even with Jesus. There he was, on the beach. A crowd gathered around to hear this provocative preacher. He used a fishing boat as a pulpit and began to preach, knowing full well he was not preaching to everybody. He began to preach knowing some would not understand, and others wouldn't really get the point and would walk away grumbling, a little disappointed that this itinerant preacher who had received such wild reviews in the papers had turned out to be more puzzling than entertaining. Like the very farmer in the story he was telling, Jesus was scattering words of wisdom and healing, knowing full well that some would land on the rocky soil of hard-heartedness, some would get eaten by the birds of desire, some would get choked out by the weeds of self-centeredness.

I think the only reason he bothered to open his mouth at all is that he knew some of the seed would land on rich soil, and this seed would produce a harvest beyond imagining. Every Sunday the seed is tossed out from the boat of our worship as we read the scripture and hear sermons and lift up our prayers, every time we gather with the children and sing hymns and listen to the choir, every time we sit in silence and baptize and break the bread the seed is cast out. This isn't the

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<sup>2</sup> IBID

only place of course that the seed of transformation is flung into our hearts.”<sup>3</sup> The seed is whirled as people feed the hungry or sit with in prayer with a friends, or knit a prayer shawl or offer healing touch. And whether were in worship or in the world, where the seed goes now largely depends upon us. As we listen and allow the seeds of grace and love to transform us in to people of abundant grace and love ourselves.

If we want to know where God wants us to scatter the seeds of faith “Listen.” Allow the stories of faith to transform your lives. The Spirit of life brings the growth and we are called upon to continue to plant the seeds. Everywhere, in all things, even if we think it’s a lost cause. Meister Eckhart wrote “Apprehend God in all things, for God is in all things. Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God. Every creature is a word of God. If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature - even a caterpillar - I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature.”<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps it would do us well to all take human appreciation courses. To recognize God all around us, in every being. Perhaps we would listen better and scatter grace and love more. Can you imagine if God only threw Grace at the good soil? What if we had a God who wouldn’t love us if we weren’t in a really good place in life? What if God required we had it ‘all figured out’ before the spirit would move within us.

Can you imagine if we had a God who looked at a homeless person and said I’d love to help you but you’ve got to get your act together before I’ll show you grace?

Or if The Holy encountered a woman being destroyed in an abusive marriage and said I was pretty sure I saw potential in you at one point but now I can see you just don’t deserve the love I’ve tried to give you?

The parables would have to say the kingdom of heaven is like an exclusive club that you will have to earn your way into through riches and good looks and a whole lot of power.

I know I wouldn’t fit into the kindom very well. There is no doubt in my mind that I’ve spent a portion of my days living as the rocky soil and the plants without any roots. And it is in those times that I noticed the extravagant sower. The God who showed me grace and love anyway. There are a few people in this room who have shared stories of the ridiculously lavish God showering hope and light to them in their dark places. And God will do it again. That is what grace is all about.

I remember coming home one day from a week long shift at an East Van teen group home. I had to have one of my boys arrested because I found drugs and fire arms in his room and it turned out he was the leader of a new gang in the city. And that same week on another day I somehow was

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<sup>3</sup> Chambers Dan, Sermon. June 20, 2004 “How to Listen to a Great Sermon”

<sup>4</sup> IBID

able to stop a raging girl from stabbing another one of the youth by getting in the middle and removing the knife from her hand.

I'm pretty sure it was the protective side of my father speaking when he asked why do you do this? Is there any hope? Aren't these kids a lost cause? I don't think so Dad - all I can do is plant the seeds and offer grace and love and out of that I believe they will find hope and new life. (In my Dad's defense I'd have to say I learned that from him, he is the most servant hearted person I know)."

And although I strive to offer grace. I now that it is much easier to offer grace and love to the loving and graceful. We all have places and people with whom we feel are worthy of the gifts of grace and love. And yet this parable calls us to take the seed out into the entire world. The seed is the revelation of God - it's the sharing of the gospel, the sower cannot be selective. Remember the stories of the prodigal son, and the shepherd who searched for the one lost sheep and the banquet where everyone from the streets is invited? That is the kind of sower we have.

God knows that everyone might not be responsive, that sometimes the seed is going to fall on dry soil, and the world will fall on deaf ears and yet God calls us to plant. It is the creator's task to give the spirit of growth. you may feel like a sower of the seeds who works hard at choosing what is right and good, planting good seeds only to discover that the rocks and weeds and the birds are working against you.

You may feel like you have tried to help that youth out of trouble but he just keeps getting caught up in the wrong crowd.

You may feel like you have offered that friend struggling with an addiction all the support you can but they just keep turning back.

You may feel like you've offered everything you have to give to this church community but it can't seem to grow.

And you may find yourself asking - What's the point?

Like so many others you may be thinking I just can't be bothered anymore.

We can't guarantee or control the outcome of acts of ministry because we do not have a God of imposition but we do have a God of possibilities and so we continue to offer.

And that is why we have communities of faith because at some point in time we are all the good soil, or the rocky soil, or that which is cluttered with weeds, or parched and dry, or being eaten up, and at other times we are capable of being the extravagant sower. And it is as a community of faith that we find a way to sow seeds of abundance into the world endlessly.

I don't know where you are at today. i don't know if you are feeling like a sower or the soil but I do know that God is scattering grace and love your way, longing for you to hear the word, understand it and bear the fruit of an abundant harvest. So as you go from here today ask yourself - Where is the reckless sower asking me to plant an extra dose of faith, hope, grace and love this week.

And may we go from here and be ridiculously lavish.

Amen.