

SERMON TEXT FOR PROPER 10A

PREACHED JULY 16, 2017 AT ZION LUTHERAN, ENOLA PA

TEXTS: Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23; Isaiah 55.10-13; Psalm 65.1-13; Romans 8.1-11

By the lake, Jesus tells the crowd a parable about a **sower** whose **seeds** fall into various places. Some seeds fall on the **path** and are eaten by **birds**. Other seeds fall on **rocky ground**, spring up and **die quickly** because they do not have **roots**. Other seeds fall among the **thorns** and the thorns **choke** them. Finally, some seeds fall on **good soil** and **yield fruit**. Jesus ends the parable saying: *"Let anyone with ears listen!"*

For the **ancient** audience, like many of us today, perhaps this parable seems self-explanatory - a sower sows seed and, depending on where they fall, there will be various **yields**. That is, **good seed plus good soil results in a harvest**. **Both** parts of the equation are **necessary** for a **yield**.

However, it's important to note that **even in good soil, the yield or increase differs**. As Jesus notes, *"But as for what was sown into 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."* The sower plants into good soil not knowing what the yield may be.

So, as Jesus explains, we are to be the "good soil." That is, we are to be the soil that **hears** God's word, **understands** it, has it **take root** within us, and then **bears fruit** - leading to some kind of **change** and **transformation** within **us** and in the **world**.

Interestingly enough, however, the parable is not **titled** the parable of the **soil** or the parable of the **seed** - although much of Jesus' **explanation** of the parable seems to focus on these two elements. Instead, Jesus himself calls it the **parable of the sower**. So, what can we learn from this sower?

The parable itself describes a sower who is **ridiculously generous** with the amount of seed he scatters, throwing it not only on the **good soil** but on soil that most of us can recognize weren't good bets: **thorny** soil, **dry** soil, and even a **beaten path**. I mean, what are the chances the seed is going to take root in **that**? This makes this sower not simply **generous** but **wasteful**. Seed was not **cheap** in the ancient world, so everyone who listened to Jesus' parable would have recognized the sheer **wastefulness**, recklessness - even **stupidity** - of such an approach to farming. Plus, most gardeners and farmers generally **map out** what kinds of seeds will go **where** and then carefully **place** each seed into the soil bed, spacing them out uniformly.

But, as we know, nature is not always our friend. **Wind blows seeds** from trees and flowers all over the place - sometimes onto good soil, sometimes to

places where they do not stand a **chance** of survival. **Birds and insects** cross-pollinate and drop seeds as they move about. **Fruit falls** from trees and vines and then cracks open to expose seeds that may or may not go on to bear more fruit. And then there's always the **stray growth** from our neighbor's yard.

This sower in the parable sounds much more like **nature itself** than like an experienced farmer or gardener. But maybe that's exactly how Jesus **intended** it. Perhaps that is how the **original gardener**, the God of Genesis who walks in the Garden of Eden, actually works. To **us** it seems **wasteful** - almost **irresponsible** - to just scatter seeds **anywhere** and **everywhere** and hope for good results. But to the God of **abundance**, to the God of grace and mercy and love, perhaps that is **exactly** the right way to go about it.

After all, it can be **surprising** to see what grows where. I have seen flowers blooming from the cracks in sidewalks where thousands of feet walk each day. I have seen vines climbing up brick buildings that rarely get any sunlight. And I am constantly amazed at the flowers that bloom well into the winter months despite the bitter cold winds and the blowing snow. Good soil that allows for growth and fruit may be found where we are not looking, in places we have not already cultivated.

So, what if churches **stepped outside** of their safe four walls and began to scatter seeds in every corner of the city, town and borough? What might be possible if our ministries, our hospitality, our proclamation and teaching of the gospel, our love and service, extended far beyond the walls of our sanctuaries and fellowship halls? Where might they extend to, and what kinds of people might they reach there?

The parable of the sower **challenges** the church and its leaders to **scatter seed broadly and widely**. We should not **hold back**, just as **God** never holds back. God never worries whether there will be **enough** seed or grace or love - and neither should we, because **there is enough**.

So I think this parable **speaks** to us on several levels. First, it challenges us to be, as the hymn suggests, **good soil** - to **be faithful disciples** and to produce good fruit. Then, we are **equally** challenged to be **sowers**, to *"go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."* We are to be **lavish** and **extravagant** in our **sharing of the gospel**, in **sowing seeds** of love and mercy. The gifts that God has given to us and to the church are **boundless**, and we are not to **hoard** them or **hide** them under a bushel basket. They are to be sown and scattered to the winds!

Finally, it is good to remember that it is not **our job** to worry about whether the seeds will grow and flourish. We are merely to be the **sowers**: to **sow** the seeds, and trust that **God** will do the rest. And we are neither to accept

the **blame** if the seeds doesn't produce much, nor take the **credit** if the yield is decent.

Ultimately, the Parable of the Sower is not about what **good soil** we are or what kind of **sowers** we ought to be. This parable is about **God** and what God is doing in the world. God both allows and causes marvelous things to be done in Jesus' name - sometimes **because** of us and sometimes **in spite** of us. For there is **good soil** in God's world, soil and seed that together will bear fruit and yield a hundredfold or sixty or thirty. *"Let anyone with ears listen!"* AMEN