

**The Reverend Marjo Anderson**

**A: Pentecost 7**

**Isaiah 55:10-13, Psalm 65:9-13, Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

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**“The Seeds Are EVERYWHERE!”**

This is an important parable.

All three synoptic gospel writers -Matthew, Mark, & Luke - have Jesus telling parables, mostly about the kingdom of God, and in each case, this is the introductory parable that sets the stage for all the rest.

You’ve probably all heard dozens of sermons on this text,

and so I’m sure you’re aware that there are many different ways to approach it.

One of the most common ways is to look at soil as a symbol of humanity for, after all, we do come from Adam, whose name comes from the adamah, the earth, the dirt, the soil

from which God formed us, according to the creation account in Genesis.

Often sermons challenge us to look at our own hearts and minds and spirits

to see if they are a good place for God’s Word to grow,

or if they are like hard-packed soil that is not open to God’s Word,

or if they are so filled with other things that they choke out the word of God.

But today I went to us to look at this text a bit differently,

because I want to focus more on the sower and the seed than the soil.

I think one of the first things that is obvious is that the sower does not come across as a good businessman.

He throws seed everywhere – not only where it’s likely to grow,

but where it’s extremely unlikely – on busy footpaths, on rocks, in the midst of weeds.

That is not the action of a reasonable or rational or logical human being.

A reasonable, rational, logical human being would not waste three-fourths of his precious seeds that way!

So why on earth would this sower act in such an inefficient, irresponsible, wasteful manner?

The episcopal priest, academic & author, Barbara Brown Taylor, retells this parable this way....

“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

& 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 seeds he sowed, the more seeds he seemed to have. None of it made any sense to him, but it didn’t matter, because he realized that he had never been happier in all his life.”<sup>1</sup>

So the first thing I want us to remember, is that God, the sower,  
is not confined by our reason or rationality or logic or common sense.  
God is a lot more generous and spontaneous and playful and fun than that!

Robert Farrar Capon, another Episcopal priest and theologian,  
claims that in this parable the sower is God the Father, & the seed sown is the Word of God.  
Think about that for a moment. What is this Word of God?

Well, it's the creative Word through which God spoke creation into being,  
it's the instructive Word that God gave in the law,  
it's the prophetic Word that God spoke through the prophets' call to justice,  
it's the Word of wisdom contained in the Psalms, Proverbs, and other literature of the Hebrew Bible,  
it's the Word made flesh in Jesus,  
and it's the Word that God speaks through the Spirit into our own minds and hearts,  
to communicate with us individually and personally.

Capon says that God the Sower is always broadcasting the seeds everywhere,  
so that the task of discipleship, then, is to find God's Word in all the places where it is,  
to see God whenever he shows up, to hear God's voice whenever he speaks,  
to follow God wherever he leads, going from God-sighting to God-sighting to God-sighting,  
in a treasure hunt that is forever and always an exciting adventure.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the second thing I'd like us to remember is that God invites us to leave our adult selves –  
with our reasoning, rationality, logic, common sense, fear, anxiety, & need for control –behind,  
and follow our heavenly Father and join in like children  
in this spontaneous and fun and exciting and adventurous treasure hunt!

So again, the first thing to remember is that God, the sower,  
is not confined by our reason or rationality or logic or common sense,  
but is wildly generous and spontaneous and playful and fun!

And again, the second thing to remember is that God calls us to follow him on a treasure hunt,  
listening and looking for clues, for seeds, wherever God has thrown them.

The third thing I'd like us to think about is what happens to those seeds that fall,  
not on hard or rocky or weed-filled soil, but on good fertile ground.

What happens to it? That seed disappears! It literally goes underground where no one can see it.  
To all appearances, it's dead and buried and there's no sign of life. Yet.

But then in God's good time, "it sprouts, and becomes what its original size and shape would never suggest.  
How strange! We want the kingdom to come in a way that we can predict,  
but Jesus talks to us about seed, and then he becomes one into the earth.

He disappears. He's dead and buried, and he comes to life unexpectedly as the bumper crops, first installment."<sup>3</sup>

Do you understand the profound truth buried in this parable?

New life comes from a seed buried in the ground that we can't even see!

So again, the 1<sup>st</sup> thing to remember is that God the sower is not confined by reason, rationality, logic or common sense,  
but acts with generosity and exuberance and delight and joy!

The second thing is that God invites us to leave our rational, reasonable adult selves behind  
and follow him like children on an exciting treasure hunt,

The third thing is that new life comes from a seed buried in the ground that we can't even see!

Think what that means to us here at Salem. It doesn't really matter if you can see growth or not,  
because God has already broadcast the seed, and some of it is buried,  
just waiting until God causes it to burst forth out of the ground!

And here comes the fourth and final point.

Remember, that much of the seed—one could argue that it was three-fourths of it—seemed to be wasted.

That does not seem like an auspicious beginning. But here's the thing:

Even when it appears that according to human wisdom,

the math and economics and stewardship in this parable seem to be in error or misguided or lacking,

God's strange new math and economics and stewardship ALWAYS work out.

Those seeds that fall on fertile ground, which may be only 1/4 of all the seeds, have an incredible yield - 30%, 60%, 100%.

God doesn't need all of the seeds to germinate and sprout in order to produce an abundant harvest.

God can do a lot with a few seeds. Or a little salt. Or a little yeast. Or just 12 disciples.

In fact, as one of my pastor friends said this week, "God's favorite building material is nothing!"

I'm going to wrap this up in just a few more minutes, but I want to do two things before I do:

First, I want to remind us all of 4 lessons we can take from this parable:

1. God, the sower, is not confined by our adult logic, but operates in a way that is more like a child.
2. God invites us into childlike faith that frees us from our so-called adult logic so that we can experience the joy of the journey.
3. New life will come from seeds that are now buried that we can't even see!
4. It doesn't take a lot to produce an immense harvest.

It's not just this one parable that teaches us these things.

All of scripture points to the fact that we need to trust not in ourselves, but in God, even when what God does seems crazy or confusing or convoluted.

We are CALLED to trust in that God.

And we CAN trust in that God.

Because that God –

the God of creation, the God of the law, the God of the prophets, the God of scripture,  
the God who became incarnate in human flesh, the God of redemption,  
the God of sanctification, the God whom we worship and adore –  
that God can be trusted, because that God is faithful to his promises.

In the words of our psalm for today, Psalm 65,

*God visits the earth and waters it abundantly*

*God prepares the grain and provides for the earth*

*God drenches the furrows and smooths out the ridges,*

*God softens the ground with heavy rain and blesses its increase*

*God crowns the year with goodness and causes our paths to overflow with plenty.*

The sower is here, broadcasting seed into all of our lives.

It doesn't matter if three quarters of them fall on paths or rocks or among the weeds.

And it doesn't matter that we can't see the ones that have fallen on fertile soil and are buried underground.

because just as Jesus rose from the dead,

the seeds that have been planted in good soil WILL yield a harvest –  
greater than anything we can imagine.

I know that, because I know that our God is faithful.

As I close, I ask you to remember those four things –

who God is,

who God calls us to be,

that new life has yet to spring up from the ground,

and that the harvest will far exceed our expectations.

Will you please turn in your bulletin to our old testament reading from Isaiah 55?

And I invite you to read responsively with me just that first couplet

as our common confession of faith:

*“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,*

*and do not return there until they have watered the earth,*

*making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,*

***so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;***

***it shall not return to me empty,***

***but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”***

Amen and amen and amen!

<sup>1</sup>Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Seeds of Heaven* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), pp. 28-29.

<sup>2</sup>Capon discusses the Parable of the Sower in his *Parables of the Kingdom* (Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 61-86.

<sup>3</sup>The Reverend Charles Hoffacker, “Clues for the Treasure Hunt”,

<https://sermonwriter.com/sermons/new-testament-matthew-131-9-18-23-clues-for-the-treasure-hunt-hoffacker/>