

This week, I spent more than a little time in our garden -- kneeling. Pulling weeds, of course, but we have a pretty good handle on those. Mostly thinning lettuce and kale. On my knees in the garden, giving thanks to God for his goodness wondering why I planted so many seeds, because most of the little plants that came up need to be pulled and fed to the chickens, so that those that are left can have room to grow. And then along about Thursday, I took a look at the lessons -- and encountered for the umpteenth time, the Parable of the Sower.

You know, I've heard some really bad sermons on this Gospel lesson, particularly from some of my more judgmental brethren. I'm not saying mine are any better, but this is one of those gospel lessons a preacher can really get his teeth into if he or she were inclined. A perfect opportunity to dish out a big helping of guilt, and then stack a bit of anxiety onto a life that probably does not need any more guilt or anxiety, especially about spiritual matters.

The point of this story is so crystal clear. The lesson contains its own sermon -- calling upon us to be the right kind of soil, Right? Most of the Bible commentaries I've read point to that fact, and then they proceed to beat it to death.

Most of the sermons I've heard about this parable and its parallels in Mark and Luke make the point that there are some of you out there that have one kind of growing conditions, others another kind of growing conditions: Some are doing OK and some are looking a little bit -- well, a little bit in need of some fertilizer.

And of course it does not take a rocket scientist to catch the point that three out of four of the cases Jesus talks in this lesson (*from which there seems to be some missing material*) about are losing situations, Right? And of course, the guilt and the burden is on **you** -- to be that kind of soil that the seed flourishes in.

I'd be willing to bet that in one way or another there are lots of those sermons being preached this very instant as we are talking, and you've probably heard all that before -- and I have a whole bunch to say about that approach to the Gospel....

But today, I'd like to talk to you about the good news of the abundance of God's grace, and I'd like you to take a little closer look at the sower.

This sower went out to sow....

But look at the way he slings the seed around, like he doesn't care where it lands, and like he's got a ton of it in his back pocket.

He slings it here and he slings it there, without regard to the direction -- he throws some in the rocks, he throws some in the weeds, he throws some on the path itself --- fortunately, he gets some into the field too... Not a very careful guy, this sower... It would seem to

me that if here were a little more precise, he might end up using less seed..

Like I said, I was reading in the Bible commentaries about this lesson, and many of the commentators go to great length to rationalize this sower's behavior, citing various sowing methods used in those times... Saying that perhaps a combination of sowing methods might account for the strange way this parable comes off... Lots of empty verbiage, that misses the point: None of them really wash.

See, this is not the average sower. This is God who is sowing his seed, and he does it differently. The mark of distinction, it seems to me is in the recklessness of the sowing. I mentioned it's like he has a ton of it in his back pocket... Well, he does. **He's God.**

God is a wasteful God. It's a sign of his creative love. I think the fact that every snowflake is different, that every leaf is specially shaped and individual points to that. If there is a sign of the creative power and energy in this world it is precisely in the wild abandon of a creative love that does not count the cost. It is God who made the dandelions millions of seeds are blown in the wind, so that one seed might take root and grow -- in my lawn.

It is this (*what seems to us*) reckless scattering of life and love and forgiveness about without holding back, without hoarding without great attention to where the seed may go that is a part of the energy of a creative God

So the sower went out and sowed, and the seeds go all over the place, and so we are not surprised to find the signs and the marks of the kingdom of God in any and all places. The sower has scattered seeds wildly, and sure lots of them don't take root, and lots of them die, and lots of them are choked out, and so on... But that also means that there will be roses growing up in between the asphalt, that there will be grace and forgiveness given in prisons, that freedom and respect will rise in places that have experienced decades of totalitarian rule, or racial separation, that Bibles will be read in places they never have before... It means that even the most solid of rocks will someday be split by the roots of growing living things -- *Imagine that! Rocks being cracked by violets...*

The sower sows excessively and wastefully, but the seed goes everywhere and the Kingdom of God may grow anywhere.

But it doesn't grow sometimes -- and that is part of the story too -- and perhaps the part that bothers some of us. For instance, why bother to waste the seeds on something like the path?

Of the six verses that make up the first part of this story, four are devoted to acknowledging that some don't make it. This is not your pollyanna parable. God may be a sower who has a great deal of joy and abandon in sowing, but not all the seed grows. The

kingdom of heaven is like a good baseball player that is lucky to get one hit out of three. There is a refreshing honesty about the results expected. There are lots of failures, but that's OK. Jesus healed ten lepers, but only one came back to thank him. We do a lot of things here on the chance of reaching one. I say a lot of words, on the chance that someone may hear something that will help.

So the parable, today, is about the abundance given to us by a God who sows his seeds of grace and mercy everywhere, yet the parable spends some time dealing with the reality that some of that sowing is wasteful and will never bear fruit. And, of course, in this section of Matthew Jesus devotes considerable time warning his disciples that they will encounter all kinds of opposition. And yet, at the end, there is this fantastic harvest --- thirty, sixty, even one hundred times the seed. It is a harvest so vast that we forget about all the waste and the worry and the failure.. The kingdom of God is like a banquet with all invited. And you can bet that the harvest will be enough to insure that all the tables are full. The seed may be scattered far and wide -- the opposition might look like it is winning, but in the end the harvest is wonderful.

I see this as a story full of hope and encouragement -- today. I see it saying "Get up and get out there, scattering seeds, and don't despair at the apparent lack of response because the harvest is just going to be overwhelming." Jesus invited his disciples to put their nets back into the water after they had been fishing all night. And the nets were so full that they couldn't get them into the boat. This story speaks to the same amazing promise of a fantastic harvest, after what appear to be setbacks. That is if you let it.

Sure, the quality of the soil will vary, but the harvest will be fantastic.

And of course, the story is written as well so that we'll reflect on what kind of soil we are. We'll go forth trying to be the right kind of soil, to be good soil, to be better soil, but remember the bottom line: The promise of this parable is that the harvest far exceeds the seed that is sown.

So, Get out there! Scatter seeds. Not seeds of guilt, not seeds of fear, not seeds of judgement, not seeds of hatred, but rather be agents of God's love, God's forgiveness, God's encouragement. Trust that while some of the seeds that are scattered won't bear fruit the ones that do will more than make up for it.

Besides, nothing will grow, unless it's sown.

In Jesus name,

Amen