

Today's second reading comes from the gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 13, verses 1 through 9 and 18 through 23. Listen for God's word to you this day:

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ Let anyone with ears^[a] listen!"

"Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away.^[c] ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³ But as for what was sown on 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."

This is the word of God for the people of God...thanks be to God.

Often times I've heard this text used to highlight the ways as Jesus followers must prepare ourselves to receive what God offers...that we, as the soil, must be tilled and worked in order to rid ourselves of weeds and rocks, gaining as much depth as possible in which roots can take hold, preparing the soil, ourselves, to receive God's love, mercy, and grace. It seems that in the middle of this pandemic we could each find ourselves rotating from one category of soil to another in the span of days, and on a bad day, maybe in the span of minutes. And, while personal, introspective work is important in the life of a Christian, this passage gives us a moment in the middle of this pandemic when we so desperately, need a word of hope to focus on what comes before any of that sort of tilling, clearing work we know is necessary .

So let us turn our attention away from the soil, and focus on the sower, the one who is casting the seed about on all these various soils. The sower who is giving what he has to give with reckless abandon.

The sower, as we receive this parable from Jesus, doesn't stop to inspect the soil and ensure that every seed that is thrown will find itself in soil ready for growth, no the sower allows the seed to fall from his hand, without regard for where it might land, the sower seems to not care about the life of the seed, the sower gives freely, while seeming to not care in his haphazard actions also seeming to have hope for each of the seeds to find their landing place ready to receive.

In our modern way of gardening and farming we would never begin throwing seed about without first considering the plot of land, examining its soil quality, and even its irrigation abilities, but this farmer, is not as concerned with the final product. He is

more concerned with sharing as much of the seed as possible, to all the various landscapes, with hope that growth is possible, regardless of the conditions.

God is our sower. God shares love in abundance, in extravagant ways, that seem ridiculous in our minds: why would the sower throw seed where it would be taken by birds? Why would the sower not pay attention to where every seed is landing? The answer is simple, God doesn't require us to look or feel or be one particular way to be the recipients of God's love. God isn't checking off some boxes before sharing that love. God is spreading love through the good news Jesus Christ brings to the world with reckless abandon. This is good news for all people, in all places, for all time, not for one particular region, only when the conditions are just right.

Austin Seminary President Rev. Dr. Theodore J. Wardlaw, suggests: "This sower throws seed not only on good soil, but also amid the rocky, barren, broken places, in order to suggest that God's vision for the world is itself often apprehended in strange and broken places."¹

And, how true is it that we often find growth in unexpected places, even in the places we thought any semblance of life would only be choked out. Sometimes even within ourselves.

Even though we might want to classify particular soil as good or otherwise that is of no concern to the Creator. The Creator longs to create and bring new life to all places. Good or any other designation mean nothing. I imagine now if we saw this sower out doing this scattering business we might walk up to him and ask if we could

¹ Wardlaw, Theodore J., Bartlett, David Lyon, and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011, 239.

help, show him a better way, misunderstanding what we were seeing altogether.

Misunderstanding the actions of God. For Jesus says to us again, let anyone with ears listen and we are not even aware that our lack of understanding, is the very place where God continues to meet us, continues to offer us life abundant.

Scholar Debie Thomas challenges us to consider these questions: “Who am I to tell God, the Creator of the earth and all that is in it, what “good soil” looks like? Who am I to decide who is worthy and who is not of the sower’s generosity? Who am I to hoard what I have been so freely and lavishly given?”² It most clearly must be my lack of understanding if I believe I am the answer to these questions.

We seem to miss another opportunity to understand God’s nature. To realize that it is in the extravagance that grace is experienced. Instead, we revert time and time again to fear. When we find ourselves living in a mindset of scarcity, worried if there will be enough seed to sow, if the conditions will be right or not, God, the sower, reminds us that there is an abundance, that we are meant for a life of abundance and God will not withhold that abundance. That God’s love will always be in abundance. We need not worry at all about God limiting the abundance of life to which we are called and for which we were created. We need not do one thing to receive God’s love.

We are in the long haul of a season where it feels like life as we’ve known it has been choked out and that there’s no hope for new life. Or, that the soil has become so thin as we become more and more divisive, critical, filled with anger, that new life will be scorched if the seed lands near.

² Debie Thomas, “The Extravagant Sower”, www.journeywithjesus.net, accessed July 6, 2020.

Debie Thomas once again offers us these questions: “In this time of sickness, scarcity, anxiety, suffering, and loss, what does the world need more than a Sower who is lavish? A Sower who errs on the side of wastefulness? A Sower who'd rather lose a bunch of seeds to inhospitable terrain than withhold a single one?”³

Friends, God loves you, abundantly, and with reckless abandon.

I pray that you find yourselves open to the love God is giving, that in the moments when you feel for yourselves that the soil is shallow and there are thorns that have encased you, keeping you from the good news of Jesus' message, that you would continue to seek God's love, it is near, even with the path is rocky. God does not withhold just because you don't think you are in the right condition. God is in fact lavish. You can expect the best in equal abundance to anyone else when it comes to God. There is enough of exactly the same thing available to each and every child of God, without condemnation and with abundant joy! So may you know it to be true, may whatever fears of scarcity and inadequacy you have be released with the assurance that God's love is for you and will not be withheld and may you share that love with others. Amen.

³ Debie Thomas, “The Extravagant Sower”, www.journeywithjesus.net, accessed July 6, 2020.