

Kristie W Finley
Sermon July 12, 2020
The Extravagance of the Sower

In this story, this parable, we can see ourselves reflected in many parts. We tend to see Jesus or God as the sower, the seed the word of God, and us the soil. But, as disciples we are called to be sowers as well.

We need to remember that this story comes on the heels of Jesus having informed the disciples about the difficulty of their work. They will be persecuted, shunned, mocked and laughed at, put in prison, feel alone and isolated and feel as if the work they are doing – this gospel spreading work isn't going anywhere. They will feel as if they only face the rocky ground, the thorns and weeds, and the cracks of the earth. Jesus was preparing them for the reality of the opposition they would face. But they would also see the blessing of discovering fertile earth, soil that nourished the seed.

So as the disciples stood on the shore of the lake with the crowds of people, I think they might have forgotten the warnings of Jesus. They might have thought, look at all these people hanging on every word, this might not be so hard. And then the first word out of Jesus' mouth is, LISTEN! Jesus did not just command the attention of the crowd, but the disciples as well, and us. We are to listen, pay attention.

I love Jesus' call to listen, particularly in a parable. One of the commentators defines a parable as "an utterance which does not carry its meaning on the surface, and which thus demands thought and perception if the hearer is to benefit from it." It draws you into the conversation, you must participate, but you have to really listen.

Do we truly listen to the words of Christ, really listen? If we are always speaking, or being spoken to, when can we reflect on the words? Listening does not have to hold words. Tending to the soil in our hearts to hear the word of God is a spiritual discipline. We need time without words to listen.

Listening and judging cannot take place at the same time. To really listen we need to take ourselves out of the center of our thoughts. We need time to hear. Listening for God, being silent and waiting is hard for us. We are used to information being pushed to us, we google anything and everything we don't know. We listen to everyone else's voice, but not God's.

Find a spiritual friend with whom you can listen, with whom you can practice this listening for God's word, letting it grow within us.

The sower here knows that many of the seeds will fall on inadequate soil, but keeps on sowing anyway. Is the sower wasting seed? Throwing it thoughtlessly around? God's reception can happen anywhere, broken places, liminal places, not only in pristine places. All are potentially good soil for the sower, and the seed is always good.

The image of a sower, sowing the seed with abandon, with abundance, is what the disciples needed to remember as do we, because we follow a God who loves us abundantly, who lavishes grace upon grace on us. This sower in the parable, the sower Jesus calls his disciples to be is extravagant. It may seem the sower is thoughtless, throwing the seed everywhere without paying attention to where it lands. It is not our task to judge the soil. If we did we would most likely never spread much seed.

Jesus speaks of things that happen to the seed in the cracks, weeds, shallow dirt, that which is eaten by birds. But we don't see what happens to all the seed. We have seen a seed grow through a crack into a

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tree, or the random stalk of corn that grows among the weeds at the side of the road, or that young person who may not show growth right away. Seeds can take root in those places and flourish.

When many of us first encountered Jesus, there is very little soil, just a bit in a cracked space, but the seed planted did not die. The seed planted in us takes a lifetime to mature. Does the sower toss the seed the same each year? So, if it doesn't take one year it might the next. Who of us has the knowledge of which seed planted **where** will grow? We judge what is not good soil, but the sower doesn't.

Extravagant sowing would spread the word to unlikely places. Jesus was worried about people. Jews and gentiles, tax collectors, Roman soldiers, or a demon possessed child. That is the radical hospitality of Jesus, the extravagant lover who is God. Sowing to reach those often forgotten, those judged not worthy.

So, as sowers whom do we follow? The judgers or the extravagant Jesus? The growth of the seed is not ours to direct. We can only join in the work that God is doing, to tend with our meager abilities.

As to judging the quality of the soil, I always remember a confirmand from years ago that appeared to be barren, hard packed soil. I was sure nothing would penetrate. Yet years later this young person blossomed and was fruitful. I can't know what or who will flourish, I can only sow. We are a judging people. It seems we have a judgement for everything. I too walk around with that log in my eye as I look for and judge the splinter in everyone else. I pray we become more of a listening people.

So, sow with abandon, not knowing what will take root, but expect wonders. Jesus is giving us a realistic view of life. When we preach or teach we don't know which soil will accept the seed. In which soil it will germinate. Often it is thrown back at us, judged before it lands. Or quickly forgotten, or choked by the pressures of the day. And in this day, there is an abundance of pressures. Pressures we have never anticipated. We can be distracted today not only by the lure of wealth, but with the fear that we cannot feed our families, or that the business we have sacrificed to build is crumbling before us, or that someone we love will fall ill.

We trust that God is at work in that seed even when we don't see it, especially when we don't see it. As with that confirmand, I should never judge the soil. The seed has power of its own, the word of God, it has energy. To sow extravagantly with love and grace, compassion, and humility, with a listening ear, always trusting in the Holy Spirit to do the work, that is our call as sowers of the seed.

I close us with a prayer from one of my favorite writers, Christine Sine:

Stop, pray, listen.

Open yourself to the eternal One
present all around.

Take time to notice the markers
of God's abiding presence
and rejoice in God's enduring acts.

Pause to acknowledge
how far we have come
on this journey towards life.

Hold onto the signs
that nudge us onwards along the path
that leads into the loving heart of the One
who is making all things new. AMEN