

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, July 16. The parable of the sower based on Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23.

Today is the first of a series of Kingdom parables we will have in church from Matthew's Gospel.

Just for review, a parable is when something is set side by side. To throw alongside. A comparison. Parables are meant to tease the mind into insight.

So, today's parable compares a sower sowing seeds to the inbreaking of the Kingdom of heaven... Jesus' reign on earth. It shows that there will be many obstacles to the growth of the kingdom, but God will provide a harvest. The parable is not so much about the future, but the present dimension of God's reign. God's kingdom of love and justice is breaking in as we speak. Where do you see God's kingdom at work in the people around you or in creation?

First of all, did you notice all the crowds gathering around Jesus? There were so many people that Jesus had to get in a boat to teach them. Now that's my kind of preaching... from a boat. What was so compelling about Jesus' message that crowds pressed in on him to hear his teaching? What were they looking for? The Roman empire dominated the people and many were left out of the Jewish religion. Maybe they wanted hope or to feel included in God's reign? What are you looking for when you come to church?

In the parable, Jesus used everyday farming language with an agrarian society to make his point. He gave sermon illustrations people would understand. Note to self.

Keep in mind, that when a sower sowed seed in Jesus' time it was called broadcasting. Like our TV or radio in the old days. You would broadcast your program, but never really know how many people were listening or watching... unless Nielson called your home surveyed you. There wasn't all the data and algorithms we see now when we watch something. So

broadcasting demonstrates a lack of control of outcomes.  
Throw it out there... and see what sticks.

In order to sow seeds in Jesus' time, a sower would place his or her hand in a satchel and toss the seeds out in an abundant fashion. It wasn't like going to Ace Hardware or Home Depot to buy the perfect bag of soil with miracle grow and then carefully plant the seeds. There was a recklessness and hopefulness to this type of sowing. Regardless of the soil, there was a hope that God would provide the sun, and water, and give the growth. It reminds me of God's grace. It is abundant and always offered to us.

In the parable, as the sower sowed seeds, some fell on a path and birds came and ate it up. When I planted grass last year, the birds had a back yard BBQ. Other seeds fell on rocky ground and quickly, but without much depth. Weeds grow in the every crack and crevice of our driveway. Other seeds fell among the thorns. The thorns grew up and choked the seeds. How many of you struggle with keeping up with the weeds? Finally, other seeds fell on good soil and they brought forth an abundant harvest. In spite of all the things that could go wrong, God brought forth a spectacular harvest. This is hopeful. Did you notice that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the seeds didn't produce a harvest.

Even in the midst of failure and disappointment the sower could face, God provided an abundant harvest.

What is Jesus saying here in the parable to us? He is reminding us not to give up on sharing our faith, but to keep sowing the seeds of faith in our homes, church, school or at work. In fact, we are always sowing whether we know it or not. You never know which ones will take. According to Isaiah in our first lesson like a seed, God's word never goes out and returns empty. Don't worry about the outcome, when the word is present, the Holy Spirit can work faith in us.

In the parable, the sower planted in all types of soil. We are pretty selective where we sow seeds. Should we expect people to show up at church in great crowds, or do we need to

broadcast differently? Also, many of the seeds we plant may never come to fruition it seems. However, Jesus is encouraging his followers not to worry about this... not to be discouraged when you face rejection or unresponsiveness to the good news of Jesus.

When you plant things, a lot can go wrong. Gardening can be frustrating. Lack of water, pests, heat, birds, dogs running and knocking down you corn. We are dog sitting my brother's dog.

I really don't think this parable asks what kind of soil are you? We are all soils at all time. There are times when we are producing good fruit, and times when we are all dried up. But God doesn't give up on us. We sang earlier, Lord let my heart be good soil. But we all have to struggle with temptation, or persecution, or the arrows of the evil one, or the lure of wealth? We know sin is in the world, in our lives, the evil one does try to snatch our faith away. The cares of the world and the lure of wealth do become our small "g" gods and do choke the Word.

But thanks be to God for Jesus and the cross. And that even in the midst of the apparent failure on the cross, God was saving the world. Sharing God's Word in faith and action, with the help of the Holy Spirit, will net an abundant harvest. Don't give up on your faith. Don't be afraid to sow seeds in places you never expect it to grow.

We know that a seed landing on good soil offers a good yield. But now we see another truth: with the right seed landing even on poor soil, surprising growth is possible. Let anyone with ears listen!"