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Tabor Presbyterian Church
July 12, 2020

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23
Lavish Lover
Zoom Worship

There's the option to focus on the ground of this story. The different kinds of soil and what makes for growth. How seeds don't always germinate. How realities on the ground make it hard to grow. There are all kinds of factors that contribute to a low-yield season and a low-yield life.

There are things that inhibit growth - for which we bear responsibility. The interpretation of this parable mentions wealth - that focusing on money, the lure of wealth, means the spiritual life gets choked off.

But I don't want to jump to the offered interpretation. There is a good case to be made that the interpretation is an add-on to Jesus's parable. That it was added later.

The parables of Jesus tend to leave the work of interpretation to us, they tend to be open-ended and disruptive, not easy to parse for nuggets of ready-made lessons. Parables are meant to shake us loose from the way we typically see ourselves or the world, or God.

This parable invites us to consider the ground, where the seeds are scattered, there are lots of places to go with that for a sermon, but I'd like to focus today on the sower. It places the parable in good company with other stories Jesus tells about abundance - the lavish nature of the one to whom Jesus directs his prayers. Like the lavishness of the father in the story of the Prodigal's Son.

There's a quality to the sower that disrupts our notion of what is acceptable or normative. Why throw seeds everywhere? Why not throw the seeds where they are *likely* to grow? A good gardener, staying within a certain budget, would consider the quality of the soil before scattering the seeds. But the sower of this parable is lavish, pouring out those seeds like there is more than enough, like there is so much seed that it won't matter if some don't end up producing grain.

It's as if the sower knows about the sun, and the wind, and the shallow, rocky ground, it's as if the sower knows about the thorns and pays no mind, just scatters seed every-which-way, *just in case*.

Just in case. One of my favorite wisdom teachers is Rachel Naomi Remen, a medical doctor, and author of *Kitchen Table Wisdom*. She had a terrible time as a girl, with Crohn's Disease. In her mid-teens she was in a coma after a massive bleed. She had eight surgeries, her large intestine removed, she had to wear an ileostomy. Doctors told her there was no cure and that she would be dead by age 40. Remen said, "*My doctors had an excellent sense of my disease; what they didn't have was any real sense of me.*" She's now 82!

She often shares the story of her early teens when she was walking on the sidewalks of New York City. She was struck by how a little blade of grass could grow through the sidewalk. All that concrete. Here's how she talks about it:

*"Over the years I've often thought of the miraculous blade of grass and wondered why none of my doctors said to me that life might work out differently than assumed."*¹

The blade of grass sprouting out of concrete - an image of hope, an image of the life force making a way in unforeseen ways.

The sower sows seeds lavishly. So many seeds. We miss what the seeds are doing when we don't look down, and notice.

We miss the seeds planted by the sower when we simply don't have eyes to see, yet. Yet. Jesus Christ coaxed people toward yet. To the woman caught in adultery, you are yet who you want to be, offering her tenderness, implies hope for the future. To his fumbling disciples who keep trying to one-up-each other, or think the kingdom is a prize to attain, he helps them see the yet of their vision - you aren't there yet, disciples, it takes time. Jesus used parables to help people move from not yet, to the realities of the kingdom.

¹ <https://awaken.com/2013/06/embracing-life-rachel-remens-story/>

Sure, we could live thorny lives where seeds can't make their way through the soil, but the seeds are still scattered there, anyway. Just in case. You may have had cases in your life where something sprouted despite yourself. When lavishness met you even in the concrete of your life.

We can, and do, make our soil rich and deep, spend time tilling the soil of our lives for the seeds to have the best chance. But there's also the possibility that even then, with all our hard work, discipline, faith, that something unforeseen happens and the grain never comes. Think of Job.

We could look around at other peoples' lives and point out their shallow soil, or all the birds or bad influences snatching up seeds. In the helping professions we have more than our share of stories of people who get chance after chance, help after help, and can't shake the habits or lifestyle choices that keep them in the predicaments they bemoan. But the blade of grass can erupt from concrete. The sower sows.

Evidently, the amount of seed is not contingent upon whether or not there are birds, rocks, or thorns.

And as for the good soil, the deep life, even the seeds that fell on good soil didn't have consistent yields - some brought forth grain a hundredfold, but some thirty.

To some degree our lives turn out how we want them to turn out based on what we put in. Yes, let's teach our children hard work, and morality, and honesty, and resilience, and delayed gratification. But even then, their lives, our lives, may not turn out exactly how we expect or want. One daughter will get a hundredfold, and another thirty. Still, the sower is sowing, all over the place, lavishly.

In one of the videos I sent out about *Implicit Bias*, the speaker Dushaw Hockett echoes what he heard from someone else - *all of us need someone who is irrationally crazy about us*. Which is exactly what Jesus came to insist about God — and to model himself; God is irrationally crazy about you. It makes no sense to our trained minds, that we are worthy of it! A lavish sower makes little sense, but anyone with ears, listen!

Amen.