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Title: Seeds Sown by the Seashore

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Scripture: [Isaiah 55:10-11](#)

Text: [Matthew 13:1-9](#)

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I have been doing some sowing and I must say, I am pleased with the results. Our backyard is heavily wooded. When we first moved into the house, the trees were thinned out, cut back for the construction of the home. A nice stand of grass was planted and it was a wonderful place for our children to play. Over the years though, the

trees grew and got thicker to the point that the lawn in the back began to thin due to a lack of sunlight. Bare spots developed. Add to this recipe, a border collie mix herding every squirrel or passerby in the neighborhood and the lawn all but disappeared.

Last summer, I hired a company to cut back the trees, maintenance well past due. Suddenly, there was sunlight in the back yard. It inspired my spring project of sowing grass seed. To ensure success, I brought in a lot of topsoil, over a cubic yard. That's more than a ton. You've got to have good soil to be successful. That's the key to sowing seed, isn't it? Good soil. It's biblical!

I did this project without anticipation of our parable from Matthew showing up in the lectionary. We've been following it since Easter. I'll admit it is a favorite of mine, not because of content but because I've been looking at it for 23 years. It is depicted in our beautiful stained glass windows. The parable of the sower. You can see the very first verse of the parable depicted in the green panel, a sower, hand in a basket, filled we assume with seed. "A sower went out to sow..." (Matthew 13:3) That is how the parable begins in all three of the synoptic gospels, although Luke adds "his seed." "A sower went out to sow his seed," he says. I don't know that "his seed" is necessary but it doesn't matter. We aren't looking at Luke's telling of the parable. We are studying Matthew's version. And it is unique in that it is the first parable Jesus tells in the gospel of Matthew. Matthew's gospel is 28 chapters long. We are nearly halfway through the gospel and the word parable hasn't been spoken. In this chapter alone, Jesus tells 7 parables and uses the word 12 different times. Why the sudden shift?

There are clues found earlier in the day, just up the street from where Jesus begins his parable marathon. It is the Sabbath and it is a busy day. It starts with Jesus and his disciples taking a walk through some grainfields. They simply pluck the heads of the grain for an early morning snack and suddenly, there is a controversy. The Pharisees said "no, no, no! That's working on the Sabbath!" Can you imagine people getting upset by such a little thing? Of course, you can. People are upset about a lot of little things right now. The pandemic has us on edge and it doesn't take much to turn something into a big deal. It was a big deal for the Pharisees.

They go to the synagogue and the controversy follows him. There was a man there with a withered hand and they all but dare Jesus to cure him. He does and evidently, you aren't supposed to do that type of stuff in worship. Can you imagine? Of course you can. We are picky about what happens in worship. Matthew says because of the healing, the religious elite conspire to destroy him.

When Jesus becomes aware of this, he leaves. But the crowd follows him and put before him a demoniac who is blind and mute. He cures him. And again, those who think you should not be doing this on the Sabbath aren't happy.

They make their way down the block from the synagogue to the house where his disciples are staying. This sounds like Simon Peter's house in Capernaum, just beside the seashore. If so, it's not the first time there's been a crowd there. Matthew says his mother and brothers come to see him and Jesus seems to ignore them, saying "...whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:50)

The very next thing that Matthew tells us is this. "That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea." (Matthew 13:1) It's been a busy day so far and if it were me, I'd be worn out, not just with all of the work but with all of the controversy. When Jesus is tired from the demands and controversy of his ministry, he withdraws to a solitary place to pray, to recharge, to renew his spiritual batteries. So there he is, sitting beside the sea. The theme slide that you've been watching throughout worship is from that very seaside by Peter's home in Capernaum.

I wonder if he was thinking about his teaching, about how it was not being well received by everyone. Preachers and teachers aren't immune to criticism or rejection. We want people to receive our words graciously with hopes that they will sow seeds of growth. I think Jesus was that way too. Sensitive while also being hopeful of good results. I think it could be that he

was meditating on his words with God's Word. It's just a possibility but one which I can imagine because there is a passage in Isaiah that sounds a lot like the parable of the sower. Listen and see what you think.

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10-11) Maybe that was the very passage that he was praying over when a crowd shows up, so large that Jesus has to socially distance by getting into a boat. From just off the seashore in a boat, Jesus changes his preaching strategy. He's begins telling them parables and the first thing out of his mouth is "A sower went out to sow."

He tells them an outrageous story about a reckless sower who is not nearly as smart as me. He starts sowing seeds and he doesn't seem to care where his seeds are going to fall. He threw some on the path and others on the rocky ground where there wasn't any topsoil to speak of. He threw some in a thorny patch where they didn't have a chance. This sower seems to be walking all over the farm, throwing big, wasteful handfuls of seed into the air. Why would he do something so stupid? Surprisingly, this reckless sower manages to get some of the seed onto good soil which produces a miraculous yield of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much grain. And to those people listening to Jesus sowing seeds on the seashore, they would have thought, "he doesn't have a clue about what he is talking about. There is nothing about this that makes sense because there is no way you could get a yield like that sowing seed that way."

According to Matthew, this was his first parable. Ridiculous. Confusing. "So the disciples asked him, 'Why do you speak to them parables?'" (Matthew 13:10) "What's up with this new way of teaching? Jesus answers. "Because these people have become a bunch of religious know-it-alls," Jesus answers. "They think they know everything about who God is and how he works. Their minds have become so clouded by their misperception that they can't perceive what's going on right in front of them. They have shut their eyes, stopped up their ears. I'm speaking in parables to break up the hard ground of their wrong-headed expectations, to loosen the soil so the seed of the Gospel can take root. But you," he says, looking fondly at his disciples, "you didn't have many expectations in the first place. Your eyes and ears have been opened to see and hear the wonderful works of God." In other words, the last people you would have expected to get it are the ones who get it."¹ (Matthew 13:10-11, paraphrased.)

I don't know if they took that as a compliment or insult. But it was neither. It was and is a strategy. Jesus was changing his strategy to tell people about God's strategy. He was teaching in parables to tell them about how God sows.

That's the focus of the story, the sower, not the soil. I know you make it about the soil. I've made it about the soil. I brought well over the 3,000 pounds of topsoil in to get grass to grow. We go to great extremes explaining the parable as being about soil and then talk about God planting seeds of love and grace, in different people. We point out that some just don't have enough good soil to get any kind of yield. I know that interpretation; I've preached that sermon. I think you and I could point to a few people whose hearts seem so hard, whose souls are so weedy, whose spirits are so parched, there's no way in the world that seeds of God's goodness and truth could grow in them. If you don't know anybody like that, turn on the news and see what's going on all over our country. You'll find more than a few examples to point to, right? And this parable seems to be speaking about those people.

Jesus doesn't call it the parable of the soil. He calls it the parable of the sower. So, if that is the case, the focus ought not to be on the spiritual receptivity and/or shortfall of soils, but on the generosity of the sower. This sower doesn't obsess about the condition of the fields. He's not stingy with the seed but rather, casts it everywhere, on good soil and bad. He's not cautious or judgmental or even very practical but seems to keep reaching into his seed bag for all eternity, covering the whole creation with the fertile seed of his love and truth.² It is a strategy of which Jesus himself is the prime example.

If Jesus had been sowing seed in my back yard instead of me, he'd be tossing huge handfuls on the roof, onto the deck, on the sidewalk, back deep in the woods and thicket onto the neighbor's property. If I saw him doing it, I would have would clear my throat respectfully and say,

"Um, Jesus?"

"Yes?"

"What are you doing?"

"I'm sowing grass seed."

"Yes, but you're not getting anywhere close to this little patch of bare ground over here. That's what we're trying to cover."

“Oh, is that what you’re trying to do?”

“Yes. What are you trying to do Jesus?”

“I’m trying to get some grass to grow, and it doesn’t seem to be growing there. I mean look at it. You’ve got a yard full of grass and the one place it doesn’t want to grow is that little piece of dirt. So I’m trying some other places.”

“The roof, Jesus? On the deck? In the woods on the neighbor’s property?”

“Well, you never know...” And that’s true. You never do.

But Jesus wasn’t doing anything as predictable as sowing grass seed. He was trying to sow the word of God on the unpredictable soil of the human heart. And not only is it unpredictable, it is invisible, which means that you can’t tell, just by looking, what kind of heart someone has. You have to sow seed everywhere, and in every way imaginable.³

You can see, can’t you, when you look at it that way, how Jesus might have had in mind Isaiah 55? Just as snow and rain water the earth and bring forth life, so God’s Word rains down and fulfills its purpose of kindling faith, hope, and love in those who hear it. God is generous, lavish, even wasteful with the seeds of love and grace. And so should we be.⁴

This might just be the truth of seeds sown by the seashore. If there ever was a time when the world needed to experience seeds of God’s love and grace, it is now. Who will be the sower? I hope it will be you. Seasoned as I am in sowing, both in my back yard and in this yard, our church, let me give you this advice.

Don’t worry about the losses, don’t waste time counting seeds, just grab that seed of love and grace and start flinging them. Throw it around with a mighty arm.⁵ Throw them at people you like and at people you can’t stand. Cast them freely on people you agree with and those you disagree with. Sow them on people who look like you and think like you and on people who bear you no resemblance in appearance or thought. Because the seed of God’s love and grace is abundant, it never runs out, there’s always more than enough. Do it today, do it tomorrow, everywhere you go. Before you know it, you’ll see some growth and I’m sure, be pleased with the results.

¹ Somerville, Jim. The Reckless Sower. A Sermon for Every Sunday, Pentecost 6A Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 @
asermonforeversunday.com,

² Taylor, Barbara Brown. The Seeds of Truth. WJK press. p. 26.

³ Somerville.

⁴ Wallace, Peter. Sitting by the Seaside. Day1.org

⁵ Wallace.