

# Sow, and Sow Again

## *The Parable of the Sower*

Matthew 13:1-9  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman  
September 17, 2023

Today being our annual Rally Day, we rightly focus on our Christian Education programs here at the church, and especially emphasize the importance of our children and youth. One of the most important lessons I learned in seminary is that children learn by observing *everything* we do and say when we gather together, not just in their church classroom. Therefore, whether it's worship, or fellowship and interaction with each other and with the children and youth themselves, **everything that happens here is Christian Education, therefore we must be aware that it be taken seriously and done with intentionality.** That's because our children and youth are listening and watching more closely than we realize.

**In that way, all that we say and do contributes to the planting of seeds (good or bad) in their hearts, minds, and spirits. That means each one of us is a sower of seeds, and with that come a very big responsibility.** That's not unlike the vow we made during the Sacrament of Baptism earlier in this service, when we promised to help guide, support, and nurture, by word and by deed, with love and prayer, encouraging our children, youth, and each other, to know and follow the ways and teaching of Jesus.

What more appropriate biblical story to share this day, then, than the Parable of the Sower, the one who abundantly scatters seeds far and wide hoping some will take root, grow, and bear fruit? I find it interesting that **most sermons on this parable focus more on the four kinds of soil than on the sower.** It goes like this. The four types of soil involved are hard, rocky, thorny, or good. These four scenarios can help describe the level of opportunity and probability that a seed will be able to grow into a healthy plant and bear fruit, or not. This overall approach often leads to the question, "**What kind of soil are you: hard, rocky, thorny, or good?**" And if not good, what can you or the church do to make it so? The scripture itself implies an almost either/or scenario in that people are categorized into one of the four types.

Later in this chapter, Matthew provides an interpretation that says the seed is the word of God, and it can be received in different ways. Some people are hard headed and won't even listen, some listen but don't give it much thought and quickly dismiss it, others are easily distracted with other priorities, or tend to give up. Finally, there are those open to hear the good news, which then takes root, starts to grow, and even bears fruit.

Here's a bit of a twist, however, on this particular interpretation of the parable. Instead of categorizing others or ourselves as one of the four types of soil, the reality is that **all four types are represented within each of us.** And depending on the timing or circumstances, the nature of that soil can change, and change again. The end result of the seeds sown in our own hearts, minds, and spirits may vary. **Some things take root, and for a variety of reasons some things don't.**

When it comes to our own spiritual growth, one of the important functions of a community of faith is to help us work and tend the soil of our hearts, minds, and spirits into being more receptive. We can become more willing and able to accept new and deeper understandings, as well as different ways of believing. **That openness and receptivity is certainly a primary focus and hope of progressive Christianity.**

Now, while everything I have just said is all well and good, it most likely was not the main point Jesus was trying to make when he told this parable. **Jesus' primary emphasis most likely wasn't on the soil, but rather on the sower and how the seeds are sown.** So, instead of just seeing ourselves as one or more types of soil, let's jump into the role of the sower of God's good news. What is good news? It certainly involves the extravagant love and grace of God, but it can also correspond to our sharing of wisdom, common sense, and how to live life to the fullest. Therefore, we are to sow seeds of love, justice, compassion, forgiveness, hope, kindness, joy, peace, light, and certainly seeds of inclusion. **Though results are not guaranteed, we are to keep sowing, hoping some of the seeds will find the right kind of soil to take root, grow, and bear fruit.** That fruit often involves some kind of change and transformation within us and in the world.

Let's look a bit closer, now, at how this sower sows seeds. Biblical commentator, author, and former Presbyterian preaching professor Thomas Long reflects:

This is no careful, prudent planter. Far from cautious, this farmer throws seed around with abandon. It flies in all directions and lands everywhere – on the hard path, all over a rock-littered patch, into the thorn bushes, as well as onto the good rich topsoil. [This person] sows the seed extravagantly, as widely as [possible], oblivious to the risks, much as God lavishes mercy [and grace and love] upon [you and me, and all] humanity. To be sure, the farmer takes some losses...but never mind. Despite the wasted efforts and the squandered seed, the farmer nonetheless achieves a bumper crop – a hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold.

**Our role in all this, then, is simple. Sow, and sow again. After all, that's how Jesus went about his ministry.** Therefore, instead of falling into despair if we don't see the results we hoped, or in a timely manner, we are nevertheless called to take the seeds of good news and scatter them everywhere. That may involve a new idea, a change in programming along the way, an act of lovingkindness to a stranger, or a challenge to the powers that be to promote peace and justice. Oftentimes, what do those efforts – our efforts – encounter? Metaphorically: hard soil, scorching sun, sharp choking thorns. **Our words and deeds – our very ministry – can indeed run into anything from indifference to obliviousness to hostile resistance. Yet, we are called to be like the sower in this parable and keep sowing seeds, regardless. That's more necessary than ever.**

I would like to ask of each of you to reflect this week upon the seeds of good news that you have scattered over the years – in the lives of the people you have encountered, and those with whom you have been in relationship, especially your family. Those of you who are parents, or teachers, or those who have been involved in youth ministry, or have served as a mentor to someone at work or elsewhere, you especially know the impact of this parable of sowing seeds and watching them take root, grow, and bear fruit...or not. **Perhaps you've been blessed to learn, even years later, just how much something you said or did meant in the life of another.**

Also, I encourage you to **reflect upon the fruitful growth of the seeds that others have planted in the soil of your life. Be grateful for those people.** Remember, our job, our purpose, is to simply continue to extravagantly sow the seeds of love and grace. Thankfully, let us understand that we are not ultimately responsible for the results.

And let us always remember, our children and youth are watching and learning from the seeds we sow, with them and with one another. Always.

Amen.

Resource:

Thomas G. Long, *Matthew*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1997. (pgs. 146-151)