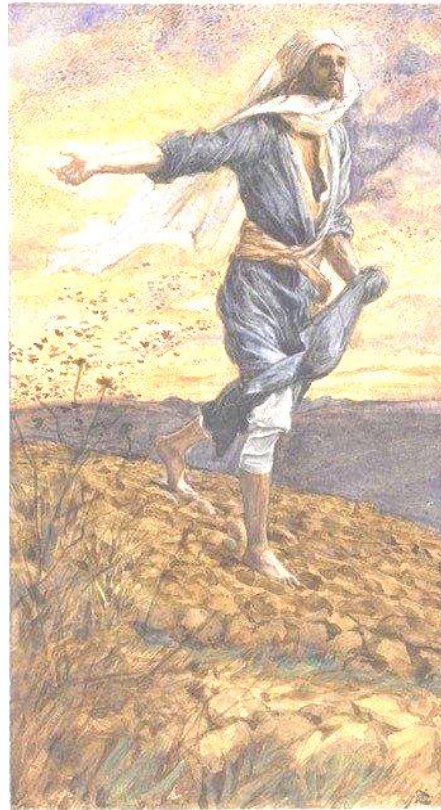


GOD SOWS GRACE EVERYWHERE!



Scripture:

Psalm 65:1-13

¹Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion; and to you shall vows be performed, ²O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come. ³When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions. ⁴Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.

⁵By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas. ⁶By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might. ⁷You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples. ⁸Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.

⁹You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. ¹⁰You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. ¹¹You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness. ¹²The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, ¹³the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the

birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!”

¹⁸“Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



GOD SOWS GRACE EVERYWHERE!

The parable of the sower. Picture this: your child or grandchild comes home from school with hurt feelings. You comfort her and begin telling her a story from your own childhood to help her deal with her hurt.

Or a friend, confused and uncertain, comes to you for advice. You reply with this: “You know, something like this happened to me once....” And you tell your story.

We use stories and parables to teach, to share, to comfort, to guide. Mark 4:2 says, “Jesus taught them many things, using stories.” Parables help us understand life and truth.

GROWING UP ON THE FARM

This parable reminds me of growing up on the farm. I used to ride on the back of the tractor, standing behind the seat when my Dad was driving.

Since we didn’t have a huge farm Dad didn’t buy the very best equipment. Our tractor was old compared to our neighbor’s big John Deere tractor, but it worked! We’d bump along the rows in the field and I’d turn and watch the seed fall out of the seeder.

The disc blades under the seed boxes make the rows below and the seeds are dropped down into the rows. Pretty cool! It was fun to watch.

Corn and soybean seed was expensive, so my Dad would try very hard not to waste any. Sometimes at the end of the rows, when we turned to go back down the other way, a bunch of seed would leak out onto the ground during the turn and I’d jump down and pick it up and try to put it back into the seeder before we continued on. It was important not to let any seed go astray!

CASTING SEEDS FREELY

That’s why, when we read our Gospel for today, it is interesting to read that the sower in Jesus’ parable is casting the seeds so freely. The story goes that a sower went out to sow; and as he cast his seeds, they fell on all types of ground: on the path, on the rocky ground, among the thorns, where the weeds grow up and choke them and finally in the good rich fertile soil.

We know of course that the seeds that fall on the good soil yield an abundant harvest. But it is hard to understand why, in this parable, the sower is so recklessly throwing around the seeds in the first place? Ever wonder why the parable just doesn’t talk about the seed in good soil? Maybe there is a lesson in the way the sower sows?

This parable is often preached with an emphasis on the ground the seeds fall on. I’ve preached before asking which kind of soil are we? Are we rocky or thorny or the packed down path where the birds easily steal the seeds? How can we be the good soil? Often this passage is used to judge ourselves and others by comparing our spiritual selves to the good soil people. And it is always good to ponder how well we use our faith and God’s blessings to be fruitful in the world.

But this Sunday, I encourage you to look at this parable in light of Paul's assurance that in Christ there is "no condemnation." Everyone gets seed no matter where they are. The sower gives them a chance.

Jesus was pointing out that the character of God is that all are given seeds of love; no one is rejected from the kingdom of God. Even if they happen to live on rocky soil, or they are traveling on hard paths, or being tempted away from loving themselves and others by the evil thorns in life that can distract us from God's love.

WHAT IS THE CHARACTER OF THE SOWER?

Look at this parable and see what it tells us about the character of the sower. The title is the parable of the sower, not the parable of the soil.

So who is this sower? We might think he or she is careless or reckless with the seed. Why throw it so wastefully?

I think this farmer knows what he is doing. This sower is throwing seeds of faith and the seeds contain God's deep grace and love inside. Because all people in all circumstances in life need grace and love to grow, even the homeless drug addicts living among the weeds, the prisoners in hard cells, and you and I who are sometimes clueless about how to be fruitful with God's love, we can still benefit from our God's generous sowing and sharing of loving, healing, forgiving grace.

God is like a relentless optimist believing that life can take root even in unlikely places; even rocky and thorny soil can provide a place of growth when grace and love are thrown at them. Maybe the sower wasn't being wasteful or careless at all. Maybe the sower knew exactly what he was doing.

Here's an example of life growing well in a very hard rocky unlikely place on a cliffside in Yosemite. (An illustration of a tree growing out of the side of a cliff was shown to the congregation.)

God is always cheering for life to grow even in hard places.

The prophet Isaiah, in chapter 55, speaks of God as a sower, a sower of the Word, which is God's message of grace and forgiveness. Isaiah says that just as the snow and rain come down and water the earth, bringing forth life, so God's Word rains down

and accomplishes that for which it is purposed, engendering faith, hope, and love in those who hear it. All kinds of terrain, the mountains, hills, and the trees clap and sing and rejoice in Isaiah 55.

GOD IS THE SOWER

Reverend Keith Anderson, a Lutheran Pastor in Ambler, PA, wrote about this parable and he said, "It's not hard to infer in Jesus' parable that God is the sower because it is God who casts the Word all about, without regard for where it lands, loving every type of soil, and showering it with the Word, with love, grace and mercy. And God not only sows the seeds and tends the soil; God waters us with rain and snow and brings forth good fruit in us by the power of the Word. While we're sitting here wondering what kind of soil we are, God is showering us with all manner of seed and blessing."

Even though my Dad had to be precise and careful where he sowed the seeds, God can be generous, extravagant, and freely sow God's grace and love, hoping it may fall, take root, and begin to grow into faith.

GOOD SOIL IS BROKEN SOIL

Another thing to remember is that good soil is broken soil. *Good soil is broken soil.* The good soil is soil that is tilled and turned, soil that has been broken up so the seeds can drop down and take root. And we are, in our own ways, broken soil. Life has turned us over and over in all kinds of ways, and this brokenness, which we desperately try to hide, happens to each one of us.

We may think our broken places, sins we have committed, mistakes we have made, somehow disqualify us from God's love.

On the contrary, our awareness of being broken and imperfect, if it humbles us, is the very thing that allows the seed, the Word, God's love and grace to take root in us.

Jesus spent most of his time with people and in places that would have been considered bad ground. He ate supper with despised tax collectors, he ministered to and healed the unclean, the sick, Samaritans, women, and turned rough fishermen into disciples. Jesus intentionally did not focus his time on the elite. He worked with those who (on the outside) did not look like good soil. Yet Jesus showered them with mercy and love, and his forgiveness produced great fruit for his ministry.

JUDGING

When first reading this parable we can be quick to judge ourselves as not being good enough soil, and we can also be quick to judge others, and place them in certain categories because they are too young or too old, of a different color or look like an immigrant who might not be documented, or worst of all, maybe they are not a regular church attender, just here to get coffee and cookies after church! Heaven forbid!

Judging is a human instinct that at one time in our evolution may have helped in survival. When the cave man or woman looked up and saw that the person coming at them with a huge stick didn't look or smell like them, they probably ran back to their tribe for safety. But now that Jesus has come to earth and taught us how to love and be open to diversity, tribalism and negative judgments of others is a sign of weakness and brokenness. God calls us to unify and come together in peaceful community to strengthen one another and live in harmony.

GROWING THE SEEDS OF FAITH

We are all capable of growing up the seeds of faith into beautiful plants that nourish and produce good fruit for God's kingdom.

We are all called to follow Jesus and his example of loving every kind of people, all kinds of ground, trusting in the power of God's Word and Holy Spirit to transform even what appears to be barren and unable to receive and understand God's grace and love.

Even in the cracked sidewalks, we often see life take root and break through the barriers.

Or even in dark, forgotten, and completely unexpected places, God's love can be the saving grace that fertilizes hard soil that others have given up on. Life is persistent. Love eventually wins.

It only takes a little break in the hard shell, a little crack of a smile, a little hope, for life to take root, and so it us with us. God's love is more potent

and more powerful than we think. God grows faith in the midst of our brokenness. God brings life out of death; resurrection can happen in the most unlikely places, in a tomb, a prison or a refugee camp, because nothing is impossible for God.

Now God, our generous sower, grants you the power to sow his seeds of grace, hope, love and forgiveness freely to one another and to all you meet out there in the hard broken world. Go and be as generous as God and watch how our world blossoms and grows. May it be so!

Benediction:

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



**Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405**