

Rev. Lisa Schrott

August 21, 2022

Luke 8: 4-15

The Sacred in the Ordinary: Seeds and Soil

During our worship series on seeing the sacred in the ordinary, we have been sharing stories and parables from the Gospels. Because the stories are often self-contained, we have sometimes forget that they are part of a narrative arc, part of a larger story Jesus was trying to convey. This morning's parable comes from the beginning of Jesus' ministry while he is Galilee. It is one of six parables that is found in all three synoptic gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Two chapters prior, in Luke chapter 6, Jesus delivers the “Sermon on the Plain,” which includes the Beatitudes – Blessed are the... known as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew – which is often thought of the beginning of the public teaching ministry of Jesus.

I invite you to hear our scripture this morning as the disciples and the crowds might have heard it, not knowing the end of the story and being a bit puzzled over why Jesus is talking about a sower planting seeds. Or to hear the words as those to whom Luke was writing in his gospel – 50-odd years after Jesus' death – trying to figure out what it means to be a follower of Jesus in a world pulled about by swirling political tensions, empires who ruled by standards bearing no relation to Jesus' command to love your neighbor, and faith communities struggling to welcome those from different cultures. And into this mix, Jesus shares what it means to welcome the Kingdom of God. Hear now these words from Luke chapter 8:

When a large crowd was gathering, as people were coming to him from town after town, Jesus said in a parable: “A sower went out to sow his seed, and as he sowed some fell on a path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and as it grew up it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew it produced a hundredfold.” As Jesus said this, he called out, “If you have ears to hear, then hear!”

Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant. Jesus said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that ‘looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand.’”

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for that in the good soil,

these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with endurance. **This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.**

This is the time of the year – the season of the year – when we talk about transitions. Recently my social media feed has been filled with my friends posting their children’s first day of school pictures. And because I have lived in a number of places in the country, these pictures form a month-long wave. My friends in Atlanta started the parade in the end of July and my friends in Minnesota will close it out after Labor Day, after the Minnesota State Fair ends. I absolutely love seeing the pictures – whether it is the first day of pre-school or the move in to the freshman dorm. The pictures are full of hope and ironed clothes – of excitement and new backpacks. And yet the pictures are also bittersweet – friends posting that they can’t believe their sweet baby is old enough to go to school or to drive to school or live on the other side of the country where they don’t know a soul – yet. So for all of you who are experiencing this in your own life, whether you are a student who is, or will be, adjusting to getting up earlier when the alarm goes off or parents and grandparents, teachers, professors, counselors, and administrators – all who are guiding the young and not so young in new journeys – I am with you as you say goodbye to the more relaxed rhythms of summer and welcome the rituals of the school year.

In the church, we are still appreciating the last days of summer, watching the Lugnuts play baseball on Friday night, working on getting native plants established next Saturday morning and celebrating with a youth pool party next Sunday afternoon. Labor Day is still two weeks away and our “official” back to the regular rhythm of church, Rally Day, not for another three weeks. Yet we can feel it in the slightly earlier sunsets that the transition to fall is coming.

Transitions in our lives rely a lot on the work of the Holy Spirit – seeds are sown, watered and fed, and we listen and watch and wait for the Spirit to bear fruit. Bearing fruit is something we appreciate in the late summer here in Michigan. As we consider the parable of the sower today, I want to start from the end, “But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with endurance.” And from the end of the parable itself we hear, “Some fell into good soil, and when it grew it produced a hundredfold.”

A hundredfold– a sign of abundance. While most Bibles and commentaries label this parable as the Parable of the Sower, I’d like us this morning to consider an alternate title “The Parable of Miraculous Yields.”

Pastor Talitha Arnold shares that in the New Testament era, “Seven-fold meant a good year for a farmer and ten-fold harvest meant true abundance. Thirtyfold would feed a village for a

year and a hundredfold would let the farmer retire to a villa by the Sea of Galilee.” She concludes, saying that “bushels of abundance are where this parable leads.”¹

We typically think about this parable with God as the sower. And we - the hearers of the word - are the seeds. And we think about all of the things in our life that can keep us from bearing fruit and yielding a harvest, our misplaced priorities and busyness that prevent God’s word from even taking hold in our life; the challenges we face— illnesses, estrangements, stresses and strains that keep our roots so shallow that a puff of wind blows us away from a life of faith, and we think we about all of the things that crowd out and choke us as we are striving to be disciples and live out God’s call in our lives – our arrogance and pride, our need for control, our anxieties about the future, and our fears of scarcity.

But what if we saw ourselves as the sower? What if God is asking each of us to the risky venture of sowing of seeds of faith? Think about the disciples to whom Jesus was addressing in this parable. They knew they were called to follow Jesus, but they didn’t yet know what that would mean. They did not know what lay ahead of them – the times of trial, the persecution, the death of their friend and teacher. As Rev. Arnold has commented: “First-century Palestine is a hard time and place to be a Christian. Due to both poverty and persecution, massive numbers of people are migrating out of the region. Within the church itself there are dissenters and false prophets. With this parable, Jesus reminds his followers—and the writer reminds his community—that rejection of Jesus’ message does not mean the message is wrong or their efforts are folly. It is simply a fact of life, whether in farming or in faith.”²

Is our world that much different? Twenty-first century America has a lot in common with first century Palestine. That is one of the reasons Jesus’ parables still speak to us through the ages. We are called to be sowers of the seed. We are called to share the word of God. Even in places where the ground is not hospitable to the word, we spread the seed anyway.

We are called to be sowers of the seed; we are called to share the word of God even when it seems like a fool’s errand – when the competing interests of the world, when technology and lattes and sporting events and work responsibilities give us easy excuses not to plant the seed of God’s love in someone’s life, not to share our faith journey with them.

We are called to be sowers of the seed; we are called to share the word of God even when it seems the world around us is spinning out of control; when the 24-hour news cycle breeds cynicism and tribalism, and when social media pushes us apart rather than pulls us together. Put our faith and trust in something we can’t see or hear or touch, something we can quantify

¹ Talitha Arnold. Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23. Pastoral Perspective. *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary. Year A, Volume 3.* David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. Westminster John Knox Press, 2011; p236. Note this commentary is on the version of the parable found in the Gospel of Matthew, rather than the Gospel of Luke.

² Ibid p238.

or monetize – seriously? We have difficulty trusting so many of the institutions our society has built. And yet, into that world – into our world - we are called to sow seeds.

We are called to say there is another way to live and be. We sow seeds because putting our trust in the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ rather than the swirling winds of the world changes everything. We are called to sow the seeds of welcome and hospitality because we know that we are better together – we know that Jesus showed us a different path – a path of inviting all to the table, not the just cool kids or the rich people or those just like us, but everyone.

We are called to sow the seeds of justice, to promote the dignity of all people – all people – and to work for reconciliation. We are called to sow these seeds even when it is unpopular and even when it seems pointless because the forces working against the seeds are so great, because maybe, just maybe, some of the seed will fall on good soil.

We are called to sow the seeds of love because God first loved us. God is generous in the love God bestowed on us. We are called to live in this love with the core of our very being – generously, faithfully, and sacrificially. And with abandon and abundance, sowing the seeds of God’s love, knowing that it is a risky venture, knowing that we might fail, knowing that some might think we are foolish for believing the Word, the Word written so long ago to a people who couldn’t even imagine the world we live in today. We sow the seeds of love so that others might grow in faith and we might even learn something along the way.

We are called to sow these seeds love and grace and justice and the good news of salvation because they give us a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. After Jesus shares the story of the sower, he calls out, “If you have ears to hear, then hear!” and the disciples ask him what this parable meant. Jesus said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that ‘looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand.’ And then Jesus goes on to explain the parable.

This curious exchange can get lost in the story of the soils and the miraculous yield, lost in the interpretation that relates the parable to our everyday lives. And yet I think it functions as more than just a transition and segue way. I think it helps us embrace the miraculous yield, the bushel of abundance, the sacred in the ordinary rhythm of seed and soil. How often do we look at something and not really perceive its depth, its true meaning? How often do we listen, but don’t understand?

We hear the words of scripture that tell us that we are worthy of God’s love, accepted for who we are for we, created in the image of God, and yet we still think we need to do more, be more, conform to standards set by humans. We listen, but do we really internalize that we are more than the sum of our parts – our lives are truly a miraculous yield? We look at each other and see our differences and we place value judgements on these differences instead of

perceiving the face of Christ in each other. The secrets of the kingdom of God too often remain elusive, hidden from us as we struggle to embrace the miraculous yield, and as we fail to accept the invitation to abundant life through our faith in the triune God, creator, redeemer and sustainer.

“If we only had eyes to see and ears to hear and wits to understand, we would know that the Kingdom of God in the sense of holiness, goodness, beauty is as close as breathing and is crying out to be born both within ourselves and within the world; we would know that the Kingdom of God is what we all of us hunger for above all other things even when we don't know its name or realize that it's what we're starving to death for. The Kingdom of God is where our best dreams come from and our truest prayers. We glimpse it at those moments when we find ourselves being better than we are and wiser than we know. We catch sight of it when at some moment of crisis a strength seems to come to us that is greater than our own strength. The Kingdom of God is where we belong. It is home, and whether we realize it or not, I think we are all of us homesick for it.”³

This quote, a portion of which is found in the Words of Preparation in today's bulletin, is from Presbyterian pastor and author Frederick Buechner. Buechner died this past Monday, August 15 at age 96. Buechner has been an influential voice in my spiritual journey, putting into simple, yet eloquent, words, what seem to be random neural firings in my brain. I have used a number of quotes from him in my sermons here at PCO – he always seemed to be able to sum up what I was trying to say so much better than I could say it myself. In addition to having a collection of Buechner's books, I receive an e-mail quote from the Frederick Buechner Center each morning – a beautiful way to start the day. I have saved many of these quotes. I have a folder in my email with quotes dating back to April 2013 – so you will continue to see them pop up in my sermons on occasion, for they are a miraculous yield and they are bushels of abundance.

A sower went out to sow his seed... some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold. If we only had eyes to see and ears to hear and wits to understand, we would know, really know, deep in our innermost being that the abundant life we yearn for is none other than the kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is where our best dreams come from and our truest prayers. It is where we belong. It is home, and whether we realize it or not, I think we are all of us homesick for it. A sower went out to sow his seed... some fell into good soil, and when this seed grew, it produced a miraculous yield. Talk about the sacred in the ordinary... Join me in prayer.

³ Frederick Buechner. *Secrets in the Dark. A Life in Sermons*. Harper Collins, 2007. p149. This quote can also be found online at <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2021/11/17/the-kingdom>.