

Sermon

Sunday, July 12, 2020

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

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St. Mark's Episcopal Church

Theme: Sowing the Seeds of Love

"Sowing the seeds of love, seeds of love, sowing the seeds of love."

I'm a product 1980s, and that song from 1989 by Tears for Fears pops into my head whenever I hear today's parable.

"Sowing the seeds of love, seeds of love, sowing the seeds of love."

In today's Gospel lesson, we heard Jesus tell the extremely familiar "Parable of the Sower."

As with all parables, this is a metaphor – and this time - Jesus even spells it all out for us.

There is someone sowing, planting, seeds. The seeds in this example are the Word of the kingdom – the good news of Jesus Christ... *the seeds of love*. The plants which sprout from those seeds are the children of God and they are filled with God's love.

Some seeds fall on the path with no cover and are plucked up by birds. These seeds represent people who don't understand – or have no one or nothing to HELP them understand - the Word of God. The birds who eat those seeds are the devil taking them away.

Some seeds fall on the rocky ground where there is not enough soil to develop a root structure. These seeds represent the people who take in the Word of God but are easily swayed away from the truth because they have no root system – no support system to keep them interested and learning. Those people wither and perish.

Some seeds fall among the thorns. They grow because they have enough soil but are soon overtaken by bigger and stronger plants. These seeds represent people who hear the Word of God and start to flourish but are distracted by the problems of the world around them and are choked!

Some seeds fall on good soil. They grow and flourish. These seeds represent the people who hear the Word of God, obey it, follow it, and live a long, happy, productive life.

The end.

"Sowing the seeds of love, seeds of love, sowing the seeds of love."

When I have heard sermons on this parable through the years, I'd say the most common theme I remember is this: What kind of soil are you? Are you the path, the rocky ground, the thorns, or the good, quality earth? Believe me, you do NOT want to be that path or that rocky ground or surrounded by thorns. You MUST be the good soil. When the Word of God comes to you, you had better be fertile earth for it to grow.

I mean, you don't want to be carried away by a bird or wither and perish from lack of roots or choked by thorns DO YOU? You want to be a good Christian listening to the Word of God...growing and thriving in the sunlight of Jesus' love. Don't you?

Well, of course you do. That is all true. But that's all taking the rather passive role in this story. I believe we are called to be people of action.

There's one thing not explained in the parable. Who is the sower? Who is that entity throwing those seeds around and waiting to see what happens?

Who is the sower?

"Sowing the seeds of love, seeds of love, sowing the seeds of love."

Let me suggest this.

YOU are the sower. I am the sower. Let each one of us take on the role of the sower.

We are called to be sowers. We are called to plant the Word of God. We are the ones who are called to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. We are called to sow the seeds of love.

And if I am the sower, if you are the sower, we should listen to this parable, take notes, and learn some lessons.

"Sowing the seeds of love, seeds of love, sowing the seeds of love."

Here are three questions I suggest we ask ourselves as we prepare to sow the seeds of love:

1. How am I planting these seeds?
2. Where am I planting them?
3. What do I do after I plant them?

"Sowing the seeds of love, seeds of love, sowing the seeds of love."

How am I sowing these seeds?

In today's parable, it seems the sower has no plan for how the seeds are going to be planted. They just walk around tossing seeds right and left, to and fro', hither, thither and yon, without any thought of what's going to happen to those seeds of love.

Of course, the sower in the parable is illustrating a point. But we should learn from the parable. That's why Jesus told us the story in the first place. Listen and learn.

These seeds of love are precious. They are valuable. Of course it is intended for everyone to hear. We should plant these seeds of love as many places as we can.

Instead of indiscriminately tossing seeds we are called to be intentional about sowing the seeds of loves. We only have so many hours in the day. We must decide how we can make the best use of the green, fertile, growing season in which we now find ourselves.

Are we planting seeds of hate? No, remember, we are sowing the seeds of love.

Are we planting seeds of division? No, we are sowing seeds of unity.

Do these seeds belong just to us? No, these seeds of love belong to everyone.

And HOW, physically HOW, are you going to sow the seeds of love? In today's world we have so many options.

Is arguing on social media about these seeds of love the best way to plant them?

Are you going to quit sowing the seeds when someone offers a suggestion on a better way to plant them?

Is putting off the planting until all conditions are perfect a good way to move forward?

Those are rhetorical questions. The answer to every one of them is "no."

God's seeds of love come in a never-ending supply. That's true. But at the same time, we are entrusted with them and must make the most of our planting season.

"Sowing the seeds of love, seeds of love, sowing the seeds of love."

Where am I sowing these seeds?

As the sower did in today's parable, of course it's possible to just toss the seeds in every direction and hope for the best. In some cases, it might reap some rewards.

We are not called to spend countless hours in empty alleys, rocky mountain crags, the middle of the ocean, spreading the Gospel. How will the seeds of love grow in isolation?

Wouldn't it be wiser to look for that good, fertile, rich earth in which to plant the seeds? Of course it is. But I'll bet quite often that good, fertile, rich earth already has lots of seedlings sprouting in it. I suppose the equivalent of "preaching to the choir" might be "you're planting corn in a cornfield."

If you find rich earth with no seedlings or mature plants growing from the seeds of love, then by all means, sow those seeds.

But there may also be good soil other places. In today's parable, maybe the seeds of love would have had a chance if the sower had cleared out those thorny plants, or removed the rocks from that one field, or taken just a little extra time to toss the seeds to the side of the path instead of on it.

Are you going to only plant the seeds of love at church each week – or with the people you see there?

Is it a good plan to stay among people you know agree with you and will receive the seeds with open arms?

Should you dive head first among the most adamant foes you can find – into the lion's den, if you will – and attempt to sow seeds while beating your head against a wall?

Those are rhetorical questions. The answer to every one of them is “no.”

God’s seeds of love must be planted everywhere, but again, we must choose places where they are not already thriving in abundance nor sow the seeds of love in a hostile environment where they have no chance to even sprout.

“Sowing the seeds of love, seeds of love, sowing the seeds of love.”

What do I do after I plant these seeds?

Even someone with no green thumb at all knows that plants need to be nurtured in order to grow and thrive.

So it is with these seeds of love God has given us. We plant them and, unlike the sower in today’s story, we have to stick around and check in on them at least from time to time to see how they develop.

Someone who has not known about the love of God – or the care and concern of a loving Christian – may need extra attention and special attention to truly thrive from seedling into a mature loving child of God.

What should we do to assure the seed we plant thrive to the best of their ability?

Should we simply toss seeds haphazardly never to return to check on their progress and hope for the best? How about we spend an hour with someone, planting seeds, showing our interest in their life and progress but then get too busy to call them again or see how they are doing? Maybe we could be great on the front end by planting more seeds than we could ever manage and then hope someone else tends and nurtures these plants, because that’s the hard part. Good idea?

Those are rhetorical questions. The answer to every one of them is “no.”

We are called to share the Good News of Jesus Christ to as many people as we possibly can. But we are also called to sow the seeds of love in a manner that allows us to nurture those seedlings and plants and help them thrive into complete loving mature Christians.

“Sowing the seeds of love, seeds of love, sowing the seeds of love.”

The Parable of the Sower is a cautionary tale of what can happen if the seeds of love are not carefully planted and cared for.

We are called to treat these seeds with love and care and do the best we can each and every day to plant and nurture them so everyone can know the love and concern of God for them. We are called to build a community of plant lovers who know how to garden – to plant seeds, to tend seedlings, to water and weed, and build a beautiful garden of diverse plants which all produce more seeds of love to be planted...

And to grow into seedlings...

And one day, those seedlings will become new sowers.

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