

“Loving Wastefully”

Matthew 13:1–9

Rev. Henry Pascual

Prayer: Master Gardener, plow our hearts with your living Word. Turn our brokenness into rich soil, that we may bloom with your love and pour ourselves out to serve a wasting world. Amen.

We’re continuing our series on the parables of Jesus. As we said last Sunday, Jesus’ parables are best understood as *challenge* parables. They aren’t simply nice stories. They challenge what we assume about God, about society, about other people, and even about ourselves. The Parable of the Sower does exactly that.

When we hear this parable, our attention usually goes straight to the different kinds of soil: hard, rocky, thorny, and fertile. We ask ourselves, “*Which soil am I?*” We turn the story into a spiritual **checklist of who is in and who is out**. Naturally, we hope we’re the good soil, and it’s easy to decide that someone else must be rocky ground or choked by thorns.

But what if we’re asking the wrong question?

There is a contemporary icon of this parable painted by Aidan Hart for Saint John’s Abbey, a Benedictine monastery in Minnesota. It portrays Jesus as the Sower wearing a plain shirt and blue jeans. Around his neck hangs a basket of seed as he scatters it across every kind of ground—hard, rocky, thorny, and fertile. Except for the blue jeans, the image is faithful to the Gospel. The Sower scatters seed on all kinds of soil without discrimination.¹

That image challenges our assumptions. Listen again to the parable.

“*A sower went out to sow,*” said Jesus. To an ancient audience, this farmer would have seemed almost reckless—maybe even flat-out stupid. Grain was precious. A sensible farmer carefully prepared the soil before planting valuable seed.

¹ *Sower and the Seed*: Aidan Hart with contribution from Donald Jackson and Sally Mae Joseph. Liturgical Press, June 28 2006. <https://litpress.org/Products/GA00032XF/Sower-and-the-Seed>

But this sower throws seed everywhere—onto the path, onto rocky ground, among thorns, and onto good soil.

We hear the parable, too, and wonder, *What is this farmer doing?* It would be like scattering seed down the middle of Pulteney Street or along Interstate 86. Why waste good seed where nothing can grow?

We may laugh at the farmer, yet the Christian church has often looked just as foolish. Over the centuries, the church has been sowing the seed of the gospel in odd places—from the rocky shores of Greece, Turkey, and Italy in the time of the apostles to the jungles of Africa and Asia of modern missionaries. Christians have continued to sow seeds of hope in places where success seemed unlikely, with no guarantee that anyone would listen. Still, they kept sowing.

Yet that is exactly the point.

God's kingdom doesn't operate according to our **standards of efficiency**. God's grace isn't reserved for the deserving. It is scattered generously, even wastefully. God's love reaches places we would never think to plant.

Even today, we experience the same thing. We speak about Christ to a friend who isn't interested. We invite a neighbor to church, but they decline. We try to live compassionately in workplaces or communities where faith seems unwelcome.

Sometimes we wonder whether it's worth the effort.

Yet we keep sowing because we follow a Sower who never withholds the seed.

If that is true, maybe the real issue isn't the quality of the soil; it isn't identifying which people are good soil. Perhaps the greater question is: **what barriers have we allowed to take root**—the things that harden hearts, choke out hope, and keep people from flourishing? That may be one of the parable's greatest surprises: it shifts our attention from judging the condition of others' hearts to examining **how we participate in God's generous sowing**.

Amy-Jill Levine, a Jewish scholar of Jesus' parables, says these stories are meant to surprise us. If we've heard this parable so often that nothing surprises us anymore, maybe we've stopped listening.²

The first surprise is the danger of thinking we are insiders.

Sitting here today, it's easy to put ourselves in the disciples' shoes. We assume we're the ones who understand. Yet throughout Matthew's Gospel, the disciples repeatedly misunderstand Jesus. They argue about status, doubt his teaching, fall asleep when he asks them to pray, and ultimately abandon him.

Meanwhile, some of the greatest faith comes from outsiders—a Roman centurion, a Canaanite woman, and others whom respectable society dismissed. Church membership does not make us immune to becoming rocky soil ourselves. This parable warns us against spiritual pride and **against deciding who is worthy of receiving God's grace**. Against sorting people into categories: who's in and who's out. But we're not *soil inspectors*. We're *planters*.

That temptation is real today.

We see declining church attendance. We meet people who have no religious interest or who have left the church wounded and disillusioned. We look at our neighborhoods, workplaces, or even our own families and think, "*Why bother? They'll never listen.*"

But the Sower never asks whether the soil deserves the seed.

Jesus paints a picture of astonishing generosity. We are called to scatter God's love through acts of justice, mercy, compassion, hospitality, and grace **without first deciding who is likely to respond**.

And here is the good news: **soil can change**.

Anyone who has worked a garden knows that hard ground can be broken open, rocks removed, and weeds pulled. **No one is permanently one kind of soil**. Hearts can soften. Lives can change. If your own heart feels

² See Amy-Jill Levine's *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*. HarperOne, 2014.

hardened by disappointment, crowded by anxiety, or shallow because of suffering, hear this: **you are not stuck**. The Sower never stops planting.

History gives us remarkable examples.

In the summer of 1955, a quiet woman from Montgomery, Alabama, attended a workshop at the Highlander Folk School. She arrived uncertain and uncomfortable in an integrated setting. There she met educator Septima Clark, who patiently planted seeds of courage, dignity, and justice. Four months later, that woman—**Rosa Parks**—refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus, helping change the course of American history.³

One seed can bear extraordinary fruit.

Jesus is realistic. Not every seed produces a harvest. We will not always see the results of our efforts. Our calling is simply to **sow faithfully**. God gives the growth.

But this parable also calls us to **cultivate the ground together**. Some barriers are larger than any one individual. **Poverty** chokes hope like thorns. **Systemic injustice** is like a rock beneath the surface, preventing deep roots. **Isolation** hardens lives until hope struggles to take hold.

As followers of Christ, we are called to **remove those obstacles**—to feed the hungry, seek justice, build community, and prepare the ground where God's peace can flourish.

When I was a young man, I moved to Manila. Three years later, I returned to my hometown for a short summer visit. When I got home, I found our front yard transformed into a breathtaking garden filled with colorful flowers. My mother had planted them. She loved flowers.

As I admired the garden, I asked, "So this is what kept you busy while I was away?"

She smiled and said, "Son, would you believe it all started with just one African daisy in a pot?"

³ Douglas Brinkley, *Rosa Parks* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 96-97.

Whenever I read the Parable of the Sower, I think of my mother's garden. I think about that flowerpot. Sometimes one flowerpot is all it takes. **God's kingdom often begins that way**—with one act of kindness. One invitation. One conversation. One seed.

So stop worrying about identifying the good soil. Stop building fences around where God's love belongs. Instead, scatter seeds of compassion generously. Speak words of hope in ordinary conversations. Offer kindness where people least expect it. **And trust God with the results.**

Jesus said, “A sower went out to sow.” As he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, others on rocky ground, others among thorns. But some fell on ***good soil...good soil***. Thanks be to God. Amen.