



The reckless sower invites us to experience the joy of abundance

Sermon for Sunday, July 12, 2020 (6th Sunday After Pentecost, Proper 10A, Track 2)

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Agricultural imagery abounds in today's scripture readings. The passage from Isaiah compares God's word to rain and snow that water the earth and bring forth growth, in the Gospel reading Jesus tells a parable that compares God's word to seed whose flourishing depends on what kind of soil it lands in, and the psalm praises God for watering the earth, preparing the grain, and providing for the earth.

This rich agricultural imagery is fitting this time of year, when berries and fruits flourish in abundance, as anyone who keeps a home garden or has been down to Gizdich Ranch lately knows.

The abundance that is so tangibly present in the fruits of the earth reminds us of the abundance of God's grace and love for us.

The sower in today's parable is a perfect example of the generosity, even reckless abandon, with which God provides for us. The sower throws out the seed on every type of surface available – on the path, on rocky ground, among thorny plants, and on good soil.

Now, I'm not much of a gardener – in fact, I'm pretty much clueless when it comes to tending plants, but even I know that the quality of the soil has a huge impact on the success of the plant, and that if you want something to grow, you choose how and where you plant it very carefully.

But that's not what the sower in today's parable does – he flings a bunch of seed all over the place, in places no good farmer would ever plant it – on the road, in a pile of rocks, in the midst of thorny bushes. The parable tells us that the seed that falls in these inhospitable places doesn't do very well, but it doesn't keep the sower from trying to plant it there anyway.

If we are the soil, God is the sower, and the seed is the Word of God, then

this metaphor says that God doesn't just reveal his Word to those who are "good soil," to those he knows will hear and understand it and put it into practice. God reveals his Word to EVERYONE, regardless of their potential for producing an abundant harvest.

In an economy of scarcity, where there is not enough to go around and we have to stretch limited resources to meet a seemingly endless need, it would be total insanity to throw seed around as recklessly as the sower does in this parable. But God doesn't operate in an economy of scarcity. In God's economy, there is only abundance – so much abundance that you can waste a bunch of seed by throwing it around on hopeless soil and still know that you will produce enough fruit for all to eat their fill and then some.

Episcopal priest and author Barbara Brown Taylor offers a preamble to this parable, an imagining of what the sower might have been doing before he decided to fling the seed around so carelessly, and I'd like to share it with you:

"Once upon a time a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came along and devoured them. So he put his seed pouch down and spent the next hour or so stringing aluminum foil all around his field. He put up a fake owl he ordered from a garden catalog and, as an after thought, he hung a couple of traps for the Japanese beetles.

"Then he returned to his sowing, but he noticed some of the seeds were falling on rocky ground, so he put his seed pouch down again and went to fetch his wheelbarrow and shovel. A couple of hours later he had dug up the rocks and was trying to think of something useful he could do with them when he remembered his sowing and got back to it, but as soon as he did he ran right into a briar patch that was sure to strangle his little seedlings. So he put his pouch down again and looked everywhere for the weed poison but finally decided just to pull the thorns up by hand, which meant he had to go back inside and look everywhere for his gloves.

"Now by the time he had the briars cleared it was getting dark, so the sower picked up his pouch and his tools and decided to call it a day. That night he fell asleep in his chair reading a seed catalog, and when he woke the next morning he walked out into this field and found a big crow sitting on his fake owl. He found rocks he had not found the day before and he found new little leaves on the roots of the briars that had broken off in his hands.

"The sower considered all this, pushing his cap back on his head, and then he did a strange thing: He began to laugh, just a chuckle at first and then a full-fledged guffaw that turned into a wheeze at the end when his wind ran out.

"Still laughing and wheezing he went after his seed pouch and began flinging seeds everywhere: into the roots of trees, onto the roof of his house, across all his fences and into his neighbors' fields. He shook seeds at his cows and offered a handful to the dog; he even tossed a fistful into the creek, thinking they might take root downstream somewhere.

"The more he sowed, the more he seemed to have. None of it made any sense to him, but for once that did not seem to matter, and he had to admit that he had never been happier in all his life.

"Let those who have ears to hear, hear!"¹

We live so much of our lives like Barbara's imagined preamble to the parable – fighting against and trying to fix everything that prevents our seed from flourishing. We spend a lot of time and energy putting up all those deterrents to keep the birds away, or digging up the rocks, or pulling up the thorns – and yet, the birds come right back and the rocks are still there and the thorns keep growing.

I don't know about you, but at that point in the story I usually get really mad and frustrated and go at it again with even more determination to keep those birds away and get rid of all the rocks and thorns. But the invitation of God through this parable is to let go of all of that.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I'm reminded of Thomas Keating's Welcoming Prayer again (for the third week in a row!). Welcome everything that comes to you, even the seeds that get eaten by birds and choked by thorns. "Let go of your desire for power and control." Let go of your desire to make the seed grow in inhospitable soil.

Trust that the seed that is meant to grow will grow, and just throw it all out there without worrying about the birds and the rocks and the thorns. In doing so, you will discover the paradox of generosity: "the more he sowed, the

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Seeds of Heaven* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), pp. 28-29.

more he seemed to have," and find true joy through living in a mindset of abundance.