

## **“What Kind of Sower Are You? (Luke 8:4-15)**

Let's begin by stating the obvious this is perhaps the worst sower of seeds **ever**. Sure, he is up against some tough competition with the legendary Johnny Appleseed or that jolly Green Giant guy from TV commercials of my youth, who honestly is a little scary. Nevertheless when a full three-fourths of your attempts to sow seeds fall on ground that is either inhospitable or downright hostile, it just does not instill a lot of confidence in your gardening ability. To put a positive spin on it, maybe it was unintentional. He was walking along, out to the field, and got carried away with whistling. And he just did not notice that some of the seeds slipped out on the path to be trampled on or eaten by birds; that some had fallen on the rocky ground only to grow a little but lacked moisture and the ability to put down deep roots. And others bounced into a nearby thorn bush where the seeds tried to grow but got cut off. To this way of thinking the sower is just careless. Or maybe he, and I am assuming based solely on my own human experience that the sower was a “he”, lacked knowledge or was a bit clueless. I remember the first time I tried to plant a garden in New Hampshire and found out first hand that the nickname ‘the Granite State’ is not just some quaint euphemism, that there are really, really big heavy rocks still embedded just beneath the ground's surface that my shovel struck with each attempt to turn over the soil. I learned the hard way what it meant to plant seeds among the rocks and I struggled mightily to grow a handful of tomatoes that first year.

Even though we say that parables are not to be taken literally, that they are stories within the larger Gospel narrative that point to poignant, even edgy, truths about Jesus or God. But to that large crowd who first stood there listening to this story about the sower, it does not matter whether it was cluelessness or carelessness, the sower was not someone people would have wanted to readily identify with or associate with, because the sower in a world of scarce resources, where every seed counts and there is a desire to be successful, was seen in Jesus' time and still is seen today as wasteful or type casted as a kind of klutz. Either way, if I am hearing this parable I know who I don't want to stand too close to or ever risk having someone say, “Oh that Wes, he is so much like that guy from Jesus' parable of the sower.”

And maybe if we did not have the advantage of eavesdropping on Jesus' interpretation with the disciples, we'd wander away like many in that large crowd wondering what in the world Jesus was talking about. We'd talk about how wasteful or foolish the sower was, or just shrug our shoulders and shake our heads that we don't get it. As it is, we get insider information. We get to almost scoff at the crowd and sit here today nodding our head in agreement thinking, “Oh yeah, just like I thought. The seed is simply a metaphorical reference to the word of God and our hearts can fall into one of the four clearly identifiable types of ground upon which the sower's seeds fell.” It makes complete sense, right? And we know that the correct answer is the last choice “D”. We want our lives to be good soil, Rock County Wisconsin kind of soil, not like that rocky soil I had to dig through in New Hampshire, but soil that is ready to receive the wisdom and truth of God.

At this point, it is really tempting to just wax eloquent about how we can rationally, with our own efforts, in three simple steps or less become good soil. But, I can't shake the question, what if Jesus isn't giving us a multiple choice test here? What if, this parable reflects the complexity of life, that sometimes despite my best efforts I still **don't get it** when God's wisdom stirs in my life? What if at times each of us is more like the pathway or the rocky ground or the thorns than the good soil? Moreover, if God is the sower, what does that say about who God is? Is God aloof to the fact that sometimes our hearts are hardened by the frantic pace of life, the stresses and strains that cut us off from sensing God's sacred movement and we are not ready? It could be that God is hopeful that even when the thorns of life prick us and leave a scar we'll still remember God was willing to stir to be planted and be found in our midst. **Or**, could it be that God's presence, wisdom, and word, that is the seeds, is really inexhaustible? And rather than seeing the ground as inhospitable for the scarce seeds of love, God is extravagant and a little reckless willing to plant grace even where it cannot grow for the sake of saying there is nowhere that is off limits to God's presence.

And if God is willing to sow seeds in places our rational minds would tell us to not even bother, perhaps we too might be willing to let down our defenses and admit we are sowers of seeds as well. We know that sometimes our careful conversations and committee-driven planning in our church still falls onto ground that is not life giving or sustainable. When I slip on that satchel of the sower, even though I may not like it, it fits. I realize that sometimes my actions or words plant seeds reluctantly, half-heartedly, carelessly; and sometimes I tend new ground, don't see the thorny bush starting to peak out until it is too late, or in other words am a bit clueless. Recently, we decided to try a once a month free community meal beginning in August. We are sowing a seed of faith here with all our human efforts, praying it might grow and reach out in a tangible way with God's love. But, to be honest, we don't know what will happen. Will this ministry grow or is the soil within us or within our community just not ready right now? Friends, even if we don't succeed, whatever that means in a world where there is abundant food resources and still hungry people, there is always the possibility of God's grace sowing and growing in the midst of our human efforts.

Notice that from our success driven understanding that only one quarter of the seeds the sower put down actually bore fruit, but looking at the parable in another way there were still moments of grace in the other three settings. Consider this, have you ever seen and marveled at a short sprout sticking out of a thin crevasse of a rock? Have you ever noticed a flower blooming in a field of prickly weeds? Have you ever seen a bird swoop down, nimbly grab seeds in her beak and swoosh into the air with unbelievable grace? Maybe those seeds the sower tossed into the first three settings were not wasted. To be sure, I am convinced that we need to hear Jesus' teachings on the life of discipleship with openness. I long to be in a good soil place when God's wisdom and words come into my life, even if it is at an unexpected or unplanned for time. But friends, when it comes to my own sowing efforts, I need to trust in the One whom willingly and intentionally let's seeds fall into places I don't always understand and cannot fully explain. I trust in God, whose wisdom still brings a silent smile to my

face when grace and love and peace come in the midst of thorny and rocky and good and busy moments of life. God keeps sowing and keeps inviting us to pick up our own sower satchels and follow the One whose life traveled an unexpected path from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, sowing seeds all along the way. What kind of seeds are you planting, where? What kind of seeds are we planting, where? And how can we follow the One whose grace scatters far and wide, even when others might shake their heads thinking we are all a little bit crazy, can we continue with openness to God's holy prompting and keep faithfully on the path of audacious and abundant sowing?

May it be so for you, for me and for all of us this day and throughout the days ahead? Thanks be to God and let all God's people say, "Amen!"