



# Deering Community Church

Pastor: Barbara Luckett Currie

EXTRAVAGANT SOWING

Sermon for 7-10-11

Scripture: Isaiah 55:10-13; Matthew 13:1-9

In our Gospel today Jesus is telling another parable—one of seven such stories he tells in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew. These stories are quite different from one another yet they are all parables about the kingdom, e.g. the kingdom is like “a mustard seed”, “like treasure lying buried in a field,” “like yeast”, “like a pearl of great price” and so on. As I often point out, kingdom talk is about astonishing, unbelievable upside down happenings. In such kingdom parables if we listen carefully, we will be guided away from rationality into astonishment, that same astonishment that farmers would experience if their crops produced thirty, sixty, or a hundred fold in Jesus’ day. According to my references, seven or eight fold was hoped for; ten fold was phenomenal, and anything above that was simply unheard of. Like the kingdom—astonishing, amazing!

In this story we are told that the farmer was sowing seeds on many types of soil: there were first seeds that fell on a path and were eaten up by birds; other seeds fell on rocky ground with no roots, no depth—these sprang up quickly and were scorched by the hot morning sun. Without roots they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns that ended up choking them to death. The last seeds fell on to good soil and were productive, grew way more than expected.

Do you think this story is about us? Barbara Brown Taylor<sup>1</sup> says on hearing this story she begins to worry about what kind of soil she is: how many birds, how many thorns, how many rocks were in her field. How could she clean up her field? How

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<sup>1</sup> “The Seeds of Heaven”, Sermons from the Episcopal Series of the Protestant Radio Hour.



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could she improve her life so that all of God's seeds would fall on fertile soil in her field? Any of you react in this way?

Maybe this story is not about us at all. After all if it were, it probably would be titled, "The Parable of the Different Grounds". My guess is that this parable is just as it is titled, The Parable of the Sower. In the Isaiah reading, the focus definitely is on the Sower. Isaiah talks about giving seed to the sower so that "my word will go out and it shall not return to me empty..." This is followed with these beautiful words in verse 12 and 13: "For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Words of abundance and transformation indeed.

So who is Matthew's Sower? God? Jesus? Let's just call him The Holy One. Listen to a description of the Sower from Taylor: one "who flings seed everywhere, wastes it with holy abandon...confident that there is enough seed to go around, that there is plenty, and that when the harvest comes in at last, it will fill every barn in the neighborhood to the rafters." This Sower is not one to carefully calculate the areas of growth for the seeds in his pocket. He has faith in a bountiful harvest no matter where the seeds fall. This Sower showers the seeds every place, every soil, with the same generous portion of seed. One of my Midrash colleagues, John Filsak called this parable the prodigal sower. I'm so familiar with that term used with the Prodigal Son but I wanted to be sure so looked it up in the dictionary. The definition there was spending resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant. I might like to call this the Parable of the Inclusive Sower. Remember a few Sundays ago we explored



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the Great Commissioning in the last chapter of Matthew. In Jesus farewell he emphasizes for us to go and make disciples of ALL nations. I believe we are being called to spread the seed not only to the rich or to the poor; not only to our friends and neighbors but to those of different colors and backgrounds and sexual orientations. When we have the hope and confidence that is part of God's amazing Kingdom, we don't have to worry about where the seeds fall. Another thing I was thinking about is that sometimes we have to sow the same seeds in the same place more than once. You never know when the ground has become fertile. Just think of all the things we have repetitively done to reach out to our local community; for example, chicken bbq's, Christmas parties, forums. This parable indicates that no matter what we do, a lot of the seeds will not take root and grow. Sometimes I feel that what we do, my sermons for example, fall on rocky ground or as food for birds; however, it is not ours to know or even worry about what the end result will be. The important thing is that we live faithfully, following Jesus. The Holy One is full of abundance—and I'm not talking about the Prosperity Gospel that seems to teach that God desires the material, spiritual, and physical prosperity of his people. To become prosperous, all one has to do is believe, receive, and act upon God's promises. It's like a "Vending Machine God: put in faith and out pops blessings – money, homes, cars, beautiful spouses, clever kids, good neighbors, big churches, and plush vacations."<sup>2</sup> When I talk about God's Abundance I'm speaking in terms of things like faith, energy, blessings, caring and loving, and the beauty of the natural world.

Another of my resources says, "Listen to what Jesus did NOT say. Not once does he mention soil analysis. His parable is not concerned with viability. There is not the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/2009/03/The-Problem-for-the-Prosperity-Gospel.aspx#ixzz1RMoeVk7Y>



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faintest hint that the sower considers the nature of the soil as he flings the seed, letting it fly scattershot in every direction.”<sup>3</sup>

It is up to us as Jesus’ followers to keep on scattering the seed of God’s word. We are to sow lavishly, foolishly, with prodigality. What will we be sowing? The seeds of love, seeds of forgiveness, seeds of peace and justice, seeds that can produce what is needed for the benefit and well being of all. It is not our job to decide who will be the fertile soil, or when or where the harvest will come about. (repeat) Neither are we to worry about wasted seed. No matter how many hours I have worked to prepare a sermon and how few people are in worship on Sunday morning, I need to just keep on doing my best to teach and preach the word—maybe there will be in church just the person who needs to hear what I have to say. It is up to God; and we know that GRACE HAPPENS BEYOND, THROUGH AND DESPITE OUR EFFORTS TO DIRECT IT.

Let us make a commitment to keep on sharing the gifts we have received without any worry as to what the seeds may do or when. God knows and all we need to do is follow in faith. Amen and amen

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<sup>3</sup> Brian Hiortdahl, Christian Century 6-28-11