

Sermon: Scattering with Abandon
6 Pentecost, Year A
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Shelby Ochs Owen
Emmanuel, Staunton
July 16, 2017

We are in the middle of the season after Pentecost, liturgically using the wonderful green color. This season is referred to as the “great, green, growing season” in the children’s church program Godly Play. And Jesus is right there with us in our growing season in today’s scripture from Matthew in a parable about the sowing of seeds. It looks as though the farmer is using some crazy farming methods! Instead of planting the seeds in nice, neat rows in freshly tilled soil, this farmer is scattering seeds as if there is no tomorrow. Throwing seeds here and tossing them there the sower seems not to care one bit that some of the seeds are landing on the path, some on the rocks and thorns and only some are falling on good soil. The story points to a farmer who is not worried about waste and is extravagant in his/her scattering.

Some call this the “Parable of the Soils” and some call it the “Parable of the Sower,” and I wonder what the story might be saying about us and what we are to learn about the sower? Matthew spells it out so that the four different soils represent people hearing the word of the kingdom and how receptive they are to that word. Some seeds fall on the path and birds come right away and eat them up, other seeds spring up quickly in the rocky soil but cannot sustain their growth; other seeds falling in the thorns are choked out pretty quickly and finally some seeds land in the good soil, “the one who hears the word and understands it, he indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” In that culture a yield of seven fold was considered a good yield so the promise here is one of abundance.

Matthew interprets the story one way, as an allegory, but with a parable there can be many different interpretations. So maybe we want to look beyond the different soils, which, as important as they are in the story, are not the central focus. What about the sower himself or herself? Let’s go back to him (or her). What is the worldview of the sower? The logical place to scatter seeds is on the good soil; indeed a good business person would suggest this farmer needs to be more careful and only plant where he thinks there will be a hope of a good harvest. And yet, this farmer doesn’t seem to care about good business practices. This farmer doesn’t seem to measure precisely, doesn’t seem to discriminate among the soils and seems to have an endless supply of seeds! The sower is simply sowing without regard for the outcome, as if there were potential in all of the different kinds of soil.

Perhaps we are being invited to be like the sower? To be like the generous, ridiculously generous, farmer? Each of us has been created with a great capacity for the divine. Every day we can sow seeds of God’s love; our words and actions fall on all sorts of soil, all sorts and conditions of people. And we can never presume to know who will be receptive and who will be closed off to God’s word. Just as we ourselves have experienced times in our own lives when we are open to God’s message of profound love and other times when we were not, we cannot expect to control the *outcome* of our own words of love to those around us. But scatter the seeds, we can!

By throwing seed not only on the good rich soil but on the broken, rocky places, this sower suggests that there is potential in all of those places, that God's love has no limitations. It is often in those barren, broken places where we first recognize our need for God. To be like the sower perhaps we can be kind and generous and loving to *all* in our path whether we think they deserve it or not, whether we think it will be well received or not. It is not up to us to determine the outcome, not up to us to control the result. Just like in our individual gardens we will plant seeds and God will provide the growth. Have you noticed the garden rarely turns out exactly as you have planned it? Have you noticed volunteer plants growing in cracks in sidewalks and flowers growing out of random walls? Last year we had one huge pumpkin plant growing right where I happened to leave the previous fall's pumpkin over the winter; never tilled the soil, never watered the seeds and yet the pumpkin plant grew!

When we share God's word of love with others, it rarely turns out the way we planned. Not all will be ready to hear, ready to receive God's love at a given moment. But some will hear, some will be ready to receive. As we share God's word of love through thought, word and action, we can trust the outcome to God and it will be good!

So...you may have noticed some chocolate kisses scattered wildly around the sanctuary! On the floor, on the pews, even on the altar. Before you leave today make sure you take one and make sure those around you get one as well. May these kisses be seeds or signs to you of God's great love for you and may they inspire you to scatter your seeds of love with abandon in the world around you - to your children, to your parents, to your neighbor, even to the ones you don't even know yet. Forgive and love as if there were no tomorrow. Don't worry about the results! In this "great, green, growing season", let's leave the results, God's harvest, to God.

Amen.