

“Grace In Abundance”

Providence United Methodist Church

Message by DD Adams

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The gospel lesson for today is from the book of Matthew, chapter 13, verses 1 through 9, and verses 18 through 23. I'll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version. That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach.

And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!”

Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and

understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

What I'd like to do now is retell this parable written by Barbara Brown from the perspective of the sower. Listen up. Once upon a time a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds 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 afterthought; he hung a couple of traps for the Japanese beetles.

Then he returned to the 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 to pull the thorns up by hand, which meant that 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 his 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 of 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.

This is God's word for God's people. Thanks be to God. Let's pray. Lord, give us ears to hear today. Amen. Barbara Brown's interpretation of The Sower takes the viewpoint of the farmer rather than placing emphasis on the condition of the soil. For the farmers and gardeners here today, we understand the importance of "good soil." There's the hard soil, the rocky soil, the thorny soil, the soil with weeds, but the fact is this. There's a great percentage of a farmer's toil when planting seed that is uncontrollable. Yet *the harvest is promised*.

Farming today is big business, but if a gardener were planting seed in a small area they'd do it by hand as farmers did 2,000 years ago. They'd reach in their bag, pull out a handful of seed, and cast the seed as they walked. Now if the wind were blowing just one little bit it would displace where the seed would land. There are all kinds of other factors too. Barbara Brown's angle recognized this thought. As much as the farmer attempted to control where the seed fell, he soon began to realize he had very little control.

The farmer bought the best seed he could. He put up Japanese beetle traps and added some foil to keep the birds away. Then as the farmer continued to sow he noticed some was falling where he didn't want it to fall. He thought he needed to be more calculating than that; after all, this seed is an expensive commodity. We don't want to waste it! He never stopped to think *the harvest is promised*.

He noticed the briars the seed were falling into, and he reminded himself to be as calculating as possible. He thought to himself, “I’ve got to plant this seed as carefully as I can. I only have so much. There’s no sense in casting it where it won’t grow.” At the end of the day the farmer went home and went to bed. When he returned to his garden plot the next day he found new little leaves on the roots of the briars that he’d broken off in his hands. He couldn’t believe it! He’d been as careful as possible to do things *just right*. Things seemed out of his control! That’s when he decided to just let go. Yes, he began casting seed not only in what he thought was good soil, but he started casting the seed everywhere! After all *the harvest is promised*.

Applying this interpretation to ourselves, we sow the word of God through mission. Individually and corporately we give money to buy mosquito nets. We take food to shelters. We listen to a neighbor’s grieving. We put our sign up during a finance meeting at a restaurant that says “Providence United Methodist Church.” A lot of times we think no one will notice. We think, “Sure is loud in here. Does anyone notice who we are? Is this doing any good at all?” We’re putting ourselves *right smack dab into the middle* of our mission field just as Jesus did. It’s then God reminds me stay the course, *the harvest is promised*.

The farmer came to the conclusion, as we should; that attempting to calculate which seed will germinate is unpredictable. God sows randomly God, and that’s how we should sow. The work we’re given to do is to be *in* our mission field and plant and be visible. There will always be seed that falls on hard soil. In fact we ourselves come to church at times with the soil of our heart hard, and we have difficulty hearing. Sometimes our minds are shut, and we’re unteachable. We criticize and pick. We take offense.

Sometimes our heart is prideful. We look at others and forget to look within our own heart. We don't want to recognize the truth because it makes us feel judged so we judge others. And then sometimes we're just too busy, and God just ends up taking second place. We also want to pray more, but we think, there are just not enough hours in the day, and that good intention falls to the wayside. We must all admit—we encounter many difficulties.

So what's all this about good soil anyway? God throws his seed randomly without thought in the most unlikely places! Look what Jesus did, he invested in the disciples who scattered and denied him when the going got tough. He invested his time in prostitutes, adulterers, cheaters, liars, pious and self-righteous ones, the blind, those who begged when they could've worked, those who had no legs and those who were deaf. What *is* good soil anyway? Who among us can't see God's abundant grace in their life that has changed them? God's abundant grace is seen everywhere, and God has the ultimate control of when the seed grows and where. *The harvest is promised.*

It may be decades before the seed we planted onto hard soil begins to grow. It might be a lifetime before the seed that was once choked comes back to life. It might be years before that seed that grew in the weeds decides to change. We don't know what God will do. We don't know who and when anyone will respond to the seeds we've planted. But let's be like Jesus, let's cast our seed randomly and extravagantly. Let's not be so calculating and let's praise and thank God for the abundant harvest in advance, *for the harvest is promised.* Praise God for God's abundant grace! Amen.