

## Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:1-9

A few weeks ago when I preached we talked about weeds. And this week we are talking about the Parable of the Sower, we are staying with this whole earth/gardening theme.

You don't have to be an expert to know that the seed thrown on certain types of ground isn't as likely to take root. Now sometimes the health of the soil/ground is really obvious and sometimes its not. The parable gives us 4 different scenarios of the different types of ground the seeds where thrown onto.

Landed on the path - in other words onto the sidewalk, the pavement.

Some seeds were thrown onto rocky ground that has a little soil but no depth and so it can't withstand the sun

Others fell among the thorns and were choked by the thrones

And then some were thrown onto the good soil

Soil is fundamental to all life on earth. Without soil we can't exist. It filters our water and grows our crops. I don't know how to talk this parable and thinking good healthy soil if I don't also talk about the situation with our actual soil in the here and now.

Did you know that, More than 75 percent of Earth's land areas are substantially degrade and If this trend continues, 95 percent of the Earth's land areas could become degraded

by 2050<sup>1</sup>. 95 percent of the food we eat is grown in the fertile topsoil that is fast being degraded by human activity.<sup>2</sup>

This past weekend at Wild Goose festival I learned about a new term. It's not a new concept for me but I didn't know the official term "overshoot" until I heard it from Brian McLaren. Do y'all know what "ecological overshoot" is? Have you heard that terms before?

Overshoot is when our civilization sucks out too many of Earth's resources for the Earth for it to replenish, and it pumps out too much waste for the Earth to detoxify.

After my interest was sparked by this word Overshoot, I researched it more and there is what is called Earth Overshoot Day. It's the date when humanity's demand for ecological resources in a given year, and the amount of waste exceeds what Earth can regenerate in that year. After that point if it's not Dec. 31 we are living in Overshoot, we are living in the red.

If you are a finance person then you know this concept just in a different way. If you have a sum of money...If you only live off your interest you aren't going to run out of money, but if you continue to live off the principal in addition to the interest you will eventually run out of money. You are living in overshoot when you run out of interest money and have to take from the principal.

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<sup>1</sup> National Geographic Article

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/paid-content-why-soil-matters-and-what-we-can-do-to-save-it>

So anyway...this year Aug 1 is projected to be our Overshoot day.<sup>3</sup> Which means we are operating in the red from Aug 1 to Dec. 31...which means we are eventually going to use up all of Earth's resources.

We are headed for disaster unless we can find a stable balance between our lifestyle and our impacts on nature. If we can reduce the amount of waste and reduce the amount of resources we are extracting from the earth. And we have to do it quickly because we've been going down this road for a long time but there hasn't been enough people, enough critical mass to shift this trend.

Now this is an oversimplification, but the big forces that research shows are behind us living in Overshoot...living unsustainable on the planet are....

High and rising consumption - or materialism - aka mindless consumption and wastefulness etc.

High and rising consumption AND its conjoining twin - capitalism.

Which in capitalism the highest value is Maximizing profits - irregardless of the means or impact. In other words it doesn't matter the type of cheap energy we are exploiting or the land we are degrading, in the moment it's working. eventually we will run out, but for NOW we are concerned with making more and more profit.

So that was some big picture stuff, Now let's zoom back in on the scripture.

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<sup>3</sup> Earth Overshoot Day

In this parable Jesus takes truths about creation and uses them to illuminate the truths about God and the kingdom of God....and so when we read the explanation we learn that just like the land, our hearts mirror this same reality. That not all soil is healthy soil ready to produce fruit. That not all people are healthy and ready to produce fruit. It says, When anyone hears the word of the kingdom (aka, when anyone hears about this radical, inclusive love that Jesus embodies) when that love is proclaimed there are different types of hearts that it can fall onto....

those who don't understand // who don't embody wisdom

wisdom isn't all about knowledge, wisdom comes from listening, from inhabiting a posture of curiosity, and seeking to always learn something new. Wisdom comes from experience, but not just having lots of experiences, but learning from what we have experienced.

Another type are those who hear with joy but it doesn't endure adversity because it doesn't have depth. It's an element of judgement to the parts of us that are shallow. When we lack depth, when we lack roots, when adversity comes our way or when the going gets tough we throw out our values, we give up on this way of life that centers love of neighbors.

And then there are those who hear and understand but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke it. The lure of comfort, and security, and making sure we have enough first. Apparently these things choke out the fruit that is growing.

And I began to wonder....maybe the same forces that are leading to the degradation of our land, are perhaps the same forces that are at work in our lives rendering our hearts uninhabitable for love.

And what if the same practices that lead to the nourishing and sustainability of our land could possibly be the same practices that lead to the nourishing of our hearts for life, nourishing our lives for love.

At home we are deep in the trenches of daily lessons on sharing. As a kid sharing is hard...especially when the item is very entertaining and you want to play with it RIGHT now, and sharing is hard when there is a limited amount of that thing.

But mom why can't I have all the cookies even though there are 4 other people in our house.

But why do I have to wait my turn? I want to go now.

But why can't I take an hour long shower? The other showers work at the same time anyway.

We have to teach children about sharing, and we have time teach them about moderation. Patience is hard, delayed gratification is hard. And so is learning to just take a little so there is more for others. Moderation is a discipline. ideally we get better at it over time.

The idea of there being a limited amount of something sends people into panic. Where more for you means less for me. And above all I have to make sure I have enough for me.

I get it, that's survival. But when does getting enough for me turn into something more. how much is enough? At what point does the pursuit of material comforts give way and become the cares of the world that choke out our ability to bear fruit?

When do I have enough things, enough clothes? When do I have a big enough house?

I'm sorry to say I don't have a clear cut answer. But what scripture seems to indicate is that the cares of the world, that is wealth, and comfort and material things have a way of growing and multiplying and sucking the life out of things. Especially our planet. But not only our planet, but also our hearts.

one summer while I was in seminary I lived in Kenya for the summer with two other students, one from the school of public health and one from the school of international development. We went to study "religions role in public health and development" and we were placed in this very remote village. There was solar electricity, which meant we had electricity but it was limited we couldn't use the lights all night, we had to be mindful. and there was central water spigot but there was no indoor plumbing. The bathroom was a hole in the ground.... But it was designed so it could be collected and used for fertilizing the trees. And for showering we had a wash bin and a cup. Its really hard for me to do a cold shower...so usually I would put a put of water on the fire to

warm up my wash bin. But I mastered how to wash my body and my hair in a few gallons of water. I'd also wash clothes weekly in this same bin. And I learned that carrying it on your head is much easier than carrying it with just your arms. And really after about a few weeks I honestly didn't think twice about this. I really and truly didn't feel uncomfortable my shower felt refreshing and I felt clean.

My plumber husband has this fancy set up at our house that is meant to detect leaks and automatically shut off your water and it also tells you how many gallons you use. Our average daily use for house is 126 gallons.

How much water is enough?

Did you know: The United States uses the most water per person in the world,

The US also leads the world in bottled water consumption per capita<sup>4</sup>

The US also generates more waster per person than any other nation in the world.

We live in a place that takes more than their fair share of the earth's resources.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theworldcounts.com/challenges/planet-earth/freshwater/global-water-footprint>

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And what if the same practices that lead to the nourishing and sustainability of our land could possibly be the same practices that lead to the nourishing of our hearts for life, nourishing our lives for love.

in verse 23 it says. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit.

those who hear it and bear fruit....(aka their lives embody and look like that radical, inclusive love they heard about, they love and care for creation, they love and care for their neighbors, the widow, the refugee).

How do we make sure that the soil we live on is good soil, is able to produce food, is able to produce life, and how do we prepare the soil of our hearts to be ready to produce love and peace and justice?

What are some practices that lead to the nourishing of our soil

And the nourishing of our hearts?

I'm convinced that the quality of our literally soil is inextricably linked to our souls. Good soil nurtures life...



I think sermon talk back is supposed to be at the end... but today I want to pause here and ask for your thoughts?

what are practices that can help us care for the actual soil? What the practices that help us care for the soil of our hearts?

practices that value sustainability and making sure others have some too..even if it requires sacrifice?

practices that resist the forces of consumerism and maximizing profit at all costs, how can we be a community that has practices that reflect the kingdom of God and perhaps stand counter to the values of the broader self indulging culture of our country?

The gardeners in here can tell us that tending soil doesn't happen over night, its a process, its a way of life

Ideas:

Community supported agriculture

Composting and tending the land you are caretaking...here at Grace, at your house

Do a consumption audit...and a waste audit.

Name ways you will cut back on consumption

Voting

Learning and sharing it with others

Spend time in nature

Another phrase that is sometimes used to refer to the gospel is "hear the good news"...

Ending:

We've talked a lot about the parable in regards to the soil, akin to our hearts. One way to read scripture is to find our place in it, and what it says about us or to us. But another way to read scripture is to listen for what it says about God. And this parable also gives us a glimpse into God's heart. See the parable is named, the parable of the sower...its not named the parable of the soil. There are other parables about seeds and weeds. But this is the parable of the sower. And so what is the sower doing in this parable? we see that God is indiscriminately sowing seeds everywhere. Throwing seeds on the pavement, and the rocks and into the thorns. Throwing seeds all over, Not just in the places where the fertile soil is where a harvest is sure to grow. Everywhere. This is where if I could I'd put up a picture of a flower that grows in the cracks of the concrete, and the tree in the midst of the desert. Because maybe love and peace still find a way to grow.

Maybe the point of this parable isn't only about judgement.

"again and again in the midst of this thorny and rocky and good world, God still is sowing a life-giving Word. Just wantonly and indiscriminately scattering it everywhere like God doesn't understand our rules." - Nadia Bolz-Webber

May it be so. May it be so. Amen