

Sermon for July 12, 2026

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

For those of you who are farmers I am certain you can tell us that Spring is always a busy time. Each year, in a few short weeks, all the fields have to be tilled and harrowed. When the soil is soft and ready, it is time to fill up the seed drill with seeds and spend days sowing the fields.

Farming in Jesus's time was similar. It was in smaller scale, certainly, and without the machines and the tractors that pull them. The fields were plowed either by hand or with a plow pulled by oxen. Harrowing and seeding were likely done by hand.

Each year during harvest season, the farmer would take some of the grains they had gathered from the fields and set them aside to be planted the following year. Each year's planting depended on the previous year's harvest. Seeds were valuable commodity, not to be wasted.

When a farmer goes out to sow, now as in biblical times, they do not intentionally spread the seeds among the rocks, under the weeds, or along the path. They spread the seeds in the good, well-prepared soil that can support their growth.

When those listening to Jesus heard this parable and its explanation, they all knew what a farmer's job entailed. They knew how much work was needed for their daily bread. They knew that a farmer wouldn't waste any of the seeds.

In our telling and teaching of the parable, we have often focused on the seeds that did not grow. There were the ones that fell on the path, or between the rocks, or among the weeds. We've heard the parable many times, and may have nodded our heads – yes, sowing the seed of God's word is hard work, and most seeds don't grow. There are, after all, three examples of why they wouldn't grow, and only one where they do.

But the seeds that fell on the path, between the rocks, among the weeds, were not sown there intentionally. Perhaps the farmer flung a handful a bit too forcefully, and

some of the seeds landed outside the tilled area. Perhaps the farmer had a few seeds left in his sack at the end of the day when he was stretching his back and his arms, and those seeds spilled on the path. All accidental.

So what if, instead of focusing on the seeds that didn't grow, we'd shift our focus on the ones that did? There were the seeds, after all, that landed in the good soil and produced grain – hundredfold, or sixty, or thirty. Some stalks grew stronger than others, some heads carried more grain, all of them valuable.

All of them grew because God gave them the growth.

Just like a seed can't force itself to grow, faith is not something we muster from ourselves. Faith is God's gift to God's people, given to us through the Holy Spirit. We can nurture our faith, or that of others – we can pray and encourage and study the Scriptures, and help faith grow, like we would nurture a plant in the garden. But in the end, faith is God's gift.

Maybe you have someone in your life, a friend, or a child, or a grandchild, who you are worried about. Maybe you've been praying for this person. Maybe you've been tilling the soil with kindness and love, and sowing the seed of God's word, and you have seen any signs of faith in their life. You've invited them to church but they don't want to attend.

Or maybe you're worried about the church as a whole. Maybe you're wondering what went wrong – did we not sow the seeds of God's word enough?

Granted, we Lutherans have not always been too comfortable talking about our faith. We've often been afraid of being seen as "those" Christians – the ones who will talk to every stranger about Jesus in a way that makes everyone uncomfortable. So, we have often erred on the side of caution, and not spoken about our faith, not sowed the seed. And that's something we need to learn to do better.

But even when we have talked about our faith, it might seem to be for nothing. Even when we have tried to raise our children and grandchildren in the church, or invited our neighbours and friends to come, very little might have come of it.

But as every farmer knows, sometimes seeds lie dormant for a while before they grow.

Some seeds need time. They need time to rest in the dark soil, they need just the right amount of rain or perfect temperature before they begin to grow roots, before the green sprouts appear.

At times we get to see the fruits of someone else's planting and nurturing. Prayers answered decades later, childhood faith rekindled, relationships restored. All that growth that was hidden for a long time has appeared.

We can never fully know what God is up to. Because God is the one who gives the growth, to the seed and to faith. God is the one who can nudge even the most stubborn hearts to believing. And God does not abandon God's children, even when we can't always see God at work.

And so we trust that God will take our efforts of sowing the seeds and bring them to bear fruit. We will continue to till the soil with kindness, love, and compassion for all the people we meet. We will continue to sow the seeds – to share our story of how God's love and grace have changed us and how knowing Jesus makes a difference in our lives. And we trust that while we might not see the growth, the seeds may just be lying dormant for a while.

God is always at work, in the church and in the world. God's loving purpose for us is life and abundance, and while often rocks and weeds get in the way, God's grace continues to surround us every day. Thanks be to God.