

JULY16, 2023 - Pentecost 7 - Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Bishop Larry Kochendorfer

As I prepared this week, I wondered this week if there was more to this parable. Something worth plowing up and tilling. Something worth taking another look at. Something surprising.

And two things jumped out at me – almost immediately. The word: “Listen!” and the action of the sower in casting the seed.

The gospel writer tells us that there were so many people beside the sea that day that Jesus had to enter a boat where he sat down – the posture of a teacher in the ancient world – while the great crowd stood on the beach. And before Jesus shares the parable of the sower and the seed – he speaks one word to the crowd: “Listen!”

Listen, not because people were talking, and he wanted them to be quiet – but listen because something important was going to be said.

Listen! Something important, valuable, needed, surprising – is coming – and you don’t want to miss it!

“Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed...” Well, you know the story – some of the seed fell on the path where it quickly became food for the birds. Other seed fell among the rocks, the stones, the pebbles – and their growth was quickly scorched by the sun. And seed fell where thorns grew, and their growth was deliberately choked out by the thorns. And some of the seed fell on good soil and brought forth grain – an amazing amount of grain – an abundant crop.

“Let anyone with ears listen.” And there’s that little word again – listen – listen for there is something important, valuable, needed, surprising here – and you don’t want to miss it.

Once Jesus has my attention this morning – once I am listening for something I don’t want to miss – I am drawn to the work of the sower. But there really isn’t anything new here – farmers sow seed all the time, right? And anyone who knows anything at all about what a plant needs to grow won’t be surprised to hear that the seed cast in the middle of a path, or on the rocks, or among thorn doesn’t grow.

No, it’s not surprising that most of the seed didn’t grow.

But listen! What is surprising is that the farmer chose to sow the seed there – chose to cast the seed where a path meandered through, and rocks were in abundance, and thorns were thick as thieves.

Listen! The wise farmer makes sure to entrust the precious seed to the best of soil – dark and black, rich with moisture and possibility, tilled and ready for the seed. Even the farmers of Jesus' day who cast the seed over the land did so on land prepared for the seed, prepared for growth, rocks removed, thorns dug out. But this farmer tosses the seed about here and there – as though the seed were available in unlimited supply.

Listen! The only conclusion that I can come to this morning – is that this is a crazy farmer! Who just scatters the seed? Who just tosses seed around apparently oblivious to where it will land?

Who just grabs a handful of seed and flings it here and there?

Listen!

God – a farmer – a sower who is extravagant, reckless – perhaps even wasteful in desire and intent. God who casts the seed of the word, of grace, of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of promise, of life – God who casts this seed everywhere – in every place, in every life, in every community – God who casts this seed – listen! – for you – for me.

Extravagant grace for you – forgiveness for you – reconciliation for you – promise for you – life for you.

This sower – this farmer – God – who we know best in Jesus Christ and in his extravagant, reckless life and death – and life for us.

We know this extravagant, reckless, wasteful truth about God not only here but in many of the other parables. Remember that crazy shepherd who risked the lives of ninety-nine sheep to search for one lost sheep until it was found? Or the son who demanded his inheritance which he blew in a far-off place – and the father in the story who simply gave his son the inheritance and who runs out to meet him with joy when he returns home. Or the Samaritan who gave all that they had to bandage the wounds of the one lying in the ditch.

What are these parables if not parables of extravagance, recklessness, and waste? What are they if not stories about a God – the God we know in Jesus Christ – who is extravagant, reckless, and yes, wasteful – in God's desire and intent to be in relationship with us?

This is the God we worship – one who casts the seed everywhere – in every place, in every life, in every community – but the story is not finished.

Listen!

This one we worship calls us to a life of extravagance, to recklessness for the gospel, to wastefulness where there is no sign or evidence of hope or of life.

Listen! We are called to follow this living in our daily ministries – at work and home, in our neighborhood and faith community – riding the bus, caring for a neighbor, serving sandwiches for the homeless, listening to a friend, providing hospitality.

Following this one – this sower – who tosses the seed here and there – who seems unconcerned about where it will land – who seems unconcerned if the seed which is thrown is eaten by birds, or withers among the rocks, or is choked by the thorns, or grows in the good soil.

In a world overshadowed by sickness, scarcity, anxiety, suffering, and loss, what does the world need more than a sower who is lavish? A sower who errs on the side of wastefulness?

A sower who would rather lose a bunch of seeds to inhospitable terrain than withhold a single one?”

A sower who calls us to sow joyfully, lavishly, recklessly, seeds of justice, peace, grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, promise – on the path, among the rocks, amid the thorns, and in the good soil.

God, a sower who casts the seed everywhere – for the love of the world.

This is something worth plowing up and tilling. Something worth taking another look at.

Let anyone with ears – listen!