

Foolish Farming
Matthew 13:1-9

Roula:

The Sower scattered the seed, not afraid of where it went. Some of it landed on rocks; some on sand; some on insufficient soil; some on good ground. The Sower did not withhold any of the seed. It was joyfully scattered, broadcast widely to the whole of creation.

Bob Knipe:

Do you believe that? The Sower just threw it all away, everywhere.

Catherine Roth:

You've got to pay attention to where you put the seed. You can't just throw it around. That's stupid and wasteful.

Bob:

You are right. What's the matter with that Sower anyway? In times like these you have to guard against so much.

Catherine:

You can't just give the seed to anybody. They have to be the right ones. We don't want the wrong ones laying claim to the seed.

Roula:

"Some of the seed might fall on rocky ground, where birds come and eat it up. Some of it might fall on places where the soil is not deep enough and when the plants sprout up they do not have sufficient nourishment to be sustained."

Bob:

See! The Sower understands. You take lots of risks when you scatter the seed so broadly.

Catherine:

We need to be responsible to see that the seed is not wasted on those who don't understand or appreciate it.

Roula:

Risk is what it's all about. You never know when something will take root somewhere you didn't expect. If we are too careful, too controlling, we might lose something special, coming from an unexpected source.

Bob:

So, in other words, we are supposed to trust in the judgment and generosity of the Sower. Well, maybe that's not so bad. It's not up to us to determine where the seed goes. The Sower will take care of that.

Catherine:

You know, you're right. We spend so much time worrying about who's supposed to get the seed. We need to trust the Sower. We need to let go of our own fears and our own lack of generosity. Maybe something surprising will happen. I guess I can let go and let God, if you know what I mean.

Bob:

Actually, that's the hard part--relinquishing control and trusting God. Yep, that's the hard part, all right.

Roula:

A sower went out to sow . . ." The parable that Jesus told is about a sower who seemed to discard the common sense of farming by scattering seeds where there is little potential for growth. The people who first heard this must have thought that the farmer is foolish because he chose to sow the seeds on the wrong kind of soil. Farmers in those days were not rich. Their livelihood depended on the success of their crops. Good seed was hard to come by; the wise farmer makes sure to entrust the precious grain he has to the best of soil. But this one tosses seed wherever he can find ground. The farmer behaved as though that which was most precious was available in unlimited supply. What in the world was he thinking?

So, this parable must have been shocking to the people who listened to Jesus. He used a common event from their daily lives to turn their understanding of God upside down. That is the way Jesus used his parables to help people understand that the kingdom of God was so different from what they thought it to be. The parables were not just cute stories that helped him illustrate a point. They were rhetorical tools that got rid of the hearers' preconceived notions about God in order to clear the way for a new understanding. So the parables were supposed to help people wake up to see God's vision for the world. Jesus said to his audience, "Listen!" This is a key word because it is meant to get us out of whatever else we're doing, whatever else we're thinking about or worrying about, and get us to pay attention.

Now most of us when we hear this parable, we start thinking about the types of soil that we are whether we are good or bad. This is our orientation. This is part of our preconceived notion about God. We tend to focus on ourselves as we make or break the deal! Our condition is what really matters to God's grace. Yet, the deeper wisdom of this lesson that shatters all of our conventional wisdom is that the kingdom of God is not entirely dependent on our actions. The kingdom of God is dependent on God's generosity. In our conventional wisdom, we may see that God is a reckless and foolish farmer, but through the wisdom of the kingdom of God, we see that God's love is lavish, generous and even abundant. God's grace is available to all. This is not to say that anything goes because these things will take care of themselves once our relationship with God is at the center of our lives.

Apparently, in God's kingdom there is much that might at least appear to be wasted. This is actually a theme running through many of the parables of Jesus. Think about the father who threw a lavish, expensive party after welcoming back his wayward prodigal son; the shepherd who left ninety-nine sheep in order to search for the one that was lost; and the person who invited his friends to a great banquet and, when they refused, told his servants to go out into the streets and invite the poor people into his feast.

The wide broadcasting of seed is indicative of the abundant nature of God. This is hard for us to accept. How could God be generous to all people, even those who don't deserve it? How could God be so accepting of us even though we are often a major disappointment to ourselves and to those who love us? Paul Tillich, a well-known theologian, once wrote, "the hardest thing about being Christian is accepting that we are accepted." Much of our spiritual journey is spent learning to truly accept God's love for us and living in that same Spirit of love as we relate to others.

In his book, *"Dark Night of the Soul,"* Gerald May shares about Saint Teresa of Avila's image for the human soul. "Teresa likens the human soul to a garden, with God dwelling in the center. The garden contains many exquisite flowers, which she says are the virtues...we do not need to instill virtues in ourselves, for God has already planted them within us. Nor do we need to worry about unwanted weeds in the garden; that too is God's work. She even implies that too much concern over virtues and vices may distract us from our primary task in tending the garden, which is only to see that the garden receives sufficient water. For Teresa, the water is nothing other than prayer, and prayer is nothing other than loving attentiveness." Our obsession with fixing the world and making sure that things are being done in the right fashion can sometimes work against our desire to live in the presence of God. Yet, Jesus' invitation to us to live in the kingdom of God is to live a life of focus on the generosity and love of God. Our calculating minds want to know if we are doing things right and well. We even worry about others doing things "right." But the radical message of the gospel is to pay attention to the work of love of the Spirit in our world.

The Jesuit Anthony de Mello tells this little story about himself. I was a neurotic [he says] for years. I was anxious and depressed and selfish. Everyone kept telling me to change. I resented them, and I agreed with them, and I wanted to change, but simply couldn't, no matter how hard I tried. What hurt the most was that like the others, my best friend kept insisting that I change. So I felt powerless and trapped. Then one day, he said to me, "Don't change. I love you

just as you are." Those words were music to my ears: "Don't change. Don't change. Don't change. I love you as you are." I relaxed. I came alive. And suddenly I changed! Now I know that I couldn't really change until I found someone who would love me whether I changed or not. Is this how you love me, God?

Oh the lavish love of God! The extravagant grace of God seems so wasteful and yet this is the very core of our lives: Abundant love. In the 13th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, we have seven stories about the kingdom of heaven. Jesus was trying to help the disciples understand and know that the reign of God was about this mysterious quality of God's love that captures us because it is the essence of who we are. And if we are able to capture this quality of the kingdom, all the things of life will fall into place.

Fred Craddock tells a story about the time he got a phone call from a woman whose father had died. She had been a teenager in one of the churches he had served as pastor twenty years before, and he would have sworn that if there was ever a person who never heard a word he said, that teenage girl was it. She was always giggling with her friends in the balcony, passing notes to boys, drawing pictures on the bulletin. But when her father died, she looked up her old pastor, the Rev. Fred Craddock, and gave him a call. "I don't know if you remember me," she started. Oh, yes, he remembered. "When my daddy died, I thought I was going to come apart," she continued. "I cried and cried and cried. I didn't know what to do. But then I remembered something you said in one of your sermons . . ." And Fred Craddock was stunned. She had remembered something he had said in one of his sermons?! It was proof enough to him that you can never tell how the seed will fall or where it might take root. This is the amazing quality of God's unconditional love and grace. I invite you today to ask yourself about how you see God's grace in your life and in the life of others. Are you captured by God's mysterious quality of love or do you think that such love is foolish?

I would like to end with a poem that I found about the abundance of God's grace. The poet uses a feminine gender for God. I hope that you will not find this offensive because God is bigger than our limitations of language and gender.

God Says Yes To Me

Kaylin Haught

I asked God if it was okay to be melodramatic
and she said yes
I asked her if it was okay to be short
and she said it sure is
I asked her if I could wear nail polish
or not wear nail polish
and she said honey
she calls me that sometimes
she said you can do just exactly
what you want to
Thanks God I said
And is it even okay if I don't paragraph
my letters
Sweetcakes God said
who knows where she picked that up
what I'm telling you is
Yes Yes Yes

Amen.