

Matthew 13:1-9
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“Seeds of Grace”

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Some of you may remember a few years ago when we came across this parable of the 4 types of soil in worship. That day the children and I did an experiment to plant seeds in cups containing each type of soil. My intention was to review the cups the following week in worship during children’s time and together reiterate Jesus’ lesson: It is best to be good soil in which the seeds of God’s love can grow deeply to sustain us and others.

If you were paying close attention the following week, I did not say a word about the 4 cups. They weren’t even in the sanctuary. I did something completely different for children’s time. And you might have wondered, why?

Because what actually happened is the experiment didn’t work. I was going to pull the plants up and show how the one in rocky soil died, the one in Sand withered, and the one in good soil grew strong.

But, when the following Sunday rolled around, while the seeds in the cup with good soil did grow, I was stunned to see the seeds in the damp rocky soil and damp sandy soil grew just as well, or better. The roots were just as long or longer than the plants in good soil. Assuming the lesson was ruined, I figured I would let the whole thing pass quietly, never mentioning the cups.

Reading the parable again this year I realize I should have shared the experiment with the children even though it didn’t go as I expected. The lesson in this parable isn’t primarily about us, what we have in this parable is a countercultural lesson about God.

In this parable, the 4 types of soil traditionally represent human response to God. If we think about that a little closer none of us are completely one type of soil in our response to God. For the most faithful person there are moments of doubt, times feeling dried up or choked. For the least faithful person there are moments when light shines the way, wisdom appears unexpectedly, truth speaks to the heart and love is recognized as a gift from God, not something we manufacture. The soils describe us.

Traditionally, in this parable God is understood as the Sower. God foolishly wastes the seed throwing it everywhere; on paths, on rocks, in weeds, places it will never grow. This sower is not a good businessperson; she could get by with 75% less seed if she weren’t so wasteful. This would cut expenses for the landscaping business; conserve the amount of seed used and make sure other projects would have enough. This blindly tossing the seed everywhere is not good business practice.

But this parable is not about wise business practices, nor is it about good farming techniques. This parable of the sewer wildly tossing the seed here, there and everywhere is about God’s Grace and forgiveness.

Friday evening a friend texted and asked us to meet them for pizza. They have a 4 month old boy and grandma was in visiting, so 7 of us shared some pizza at an outdoor table. Grandma was a little too excited to eat so she held the baby. This little bundle was staring intently all around the table, and at people who walked by. It was amazing how as another human face came into focus, no matter who it was, no matter if they were young or old, friend or stranger, pretty or ugly, no matter their clothes or skin color, no matter if they were bored, or happy or worried looking this baby boy would respond with absolute delight. He had learned to chuckle that week and it was beautiful to see.”

“Our little outdoor table became the location of unmerited Grace. And as I watched that baby play with any person who would respond... I felt awestruck... because I realized this is how God looks at us, staring into our faces in order to be delighted, to see the creature and creation as they were created. As Psalm 139 puts it, ‘darkness is as nothing to God, who can look right through whatever evil we’ve done in our lives to the creature made in the divine image.’”

Grace changes us. Grace transforms us. Grace releases us from the bondage of sin. Grace unhinges us from traps of regret. Grace sets us free to be the people God has made us to be. God does not define us by our mistakes, abuses, and failures. Grace says... We are made in the divine image.

Many of you know I am sort of a SummerFest addict. Well the First Wednesday, June 28th, my brother and I were caught in a torrential downpour. The storm winds were blowing the rain horizontally. First it came out of the west for at least 20 minutes, then it came out of the north for another 20 minutes. We took up shelter at one of the covered stages, and still the rain blew sideways right through the entire venue.

One expects after 45 minutes of the worst kind of storm, the rain would subside, it didn’t. It continued raining hard for 2 ½ hours. We walked back to our car through puddles turned into ponds. No one was dry, no one there could avoid the rain. The rain in that 2 ½ hours came just 3/100’s short of setting a new record for rainfall on that date in Milwaukee’s history. That is the way God’s grace, God’s unconditional love... comes... to all.

In the parable the sower tosses seeds of Grace, everywhere. Because she knows some will take root, even in places where they are least expected. That’s why this Sower tosses seed into the halls of Madison’s Capital and the chambers of the US Congress. The sower tosses seed into sandy paths of poverty, hunger and homelessness. The sower tosses seed into the troubled streets of Syria and Nigeria. The Sower tosses seed into the dry soil of prisons and juvenile detention centers. The Sower tosses seeds of compassion into rooms of hospitals and homes where people face illness, recovery and death. The sower tosses seed into the lives of people marginalized because of who The Sower made them to be. The sower tosses seed into Cold and hidden places you and I never notice, and She tosses seed into the weedy, sandy and often good soil hearts of you and me.

This is the real lesson from my experiment in that Children's sermon and it is why we should have talked about what happened to the soils and seeds, we should have talked about what God is doing. Because no one really knows where God's love is needed, or where it will take root. Grace is to be offered widely and wildly.

God's grace is captured in the words of one of the great hymns of the church,

“Come Thou Fount of ev'ry blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy **grace**;
Streams of **mercy**, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet
Sung by flaming tongues above;
Praise the mount—I'm fixed upon it—
Mount of Thy redeeming love.
O to **grace** how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wand'ring heart to Thee.
Prone to wander—Lord, I feel it—
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart—O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.

AMEN