

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23
“Grace: Nothing Measured, Nothing Wasted”

July 12, 2020

NOTE: The following sermon was preached as a shared conversation.

David: This is a story about a sower who went out to sow seed.

Rhonda: Wait. What? A sower who sows seeds. That doesn't make any sense.

David: Why not?

Rhonda: Who ever heard of a sower who sows seeds? Everyone knows sowers sow clothes. They work with a thread and needle. They make pants, shirts. They take torn things and mend them.

David: That's a different kind of sower. That's a s-e-w-e-r kind of sewer.

Paul: S-e-w-e-r. Doesn't that spell sewer, as in street sewer—place where everything inside the toilet goes outside?

David: Yes, I suppose it does, but here's the thing about words: you have to pay attention not only to how they are spelt but also to how they're being used. The meaning of a word is in the use of a word.

Katy: You mean love doesn't always mean love?

David: I mean that if a word sounds like one thing but comes out looking like something else, then you have to ask yourself: who's doing the talking?

Rhonda: So Jesus tells a story about a sower who went out to sow...

Paul: Seed.

David: Yes, seed.

Katy: What kind of seeds were they? Apple seeds? Sunflower seeds?

David: Jesus doesn't say. All seeds are small, hard on every side, and on their own aren't worth anything at all. It was probably something like a mustard seed. They're the smallest, hardest, most worthless seed around, and those are the kinds of seeds Jesus liked the most.

Rhonda: Why did Jesus like those the most?

Paul: Jesus liked anything small, hard, and worthless—seeds, people, you name it. The smaller, harder, and more worthless a thing is the more possibility there is for it to become something big, promising, and priceless.

Katy: For a seed to grow, to become, it needs water, sunshine, time, and a pair of caring hands to plant it, to get it going, and then to believe in its rising.

David: Once upon a time there was a sower who went out to sow seed.

Rhonda: Sounds like the kind of story Jesus would tell.

David: And as he sowed, he scattered the seed. Some of it fell on the road, and birds ate it.

Katy: Some fell in the gravel; it sprouted quickly but didn't put down roots, so when the sun came up it withered just as quickly.

Rhonda: Some fell in the weeds; as it came up, it was strangled by the weeds.

Paul: Some fell on good earth, and produced a harvest beyond the sower's wildest dreams.

David: Are you listening to this?"

Rhonda: Yeah, I'm listening. In fact, I'm hearing every word, and I've got some questions.

Paul: Like what?

Rhonda: Like why didn't the sower pay better attention to where he was putting the seed? Seems to me that 75% of all the seed went to waste. Who throws seed on a path where people and animals walk? That's just going to cause the seed to get kicked around or eaten up. The seed won't have a chance to take, or any shot of growing.

Paul: And on gravel? Who ever heard of rocks being good food for potatoes and marigolds?

Katy: If I had to describe this sower, I'd say he's dumb, irresponsible, and ineffective.

David: Maybe he's just frustrated.

Rhonda: Frustrated? By what?

David: Frustrated by the fact that there isn't enough good soil to go around. That all the good soil has been bought up, and that the people who bought it have fenced it in.

Rhonda: To keep it safe?

Katy: To keep it protected.

David: That's right.

Paul: To keep it protected from whom?

David: From the sower. We've heard it said that what everyone wants is rich soil, because rich soil makes for the best crops. But you know what the best crops make for? The best money.

Rhonda: The sower doesn't care about having rich soil and the best crops?

David: Of course the sower cares about having rich soil and the best crops. What the sower doesn't care about is getting rich off the soil.

Paul: What's wrong with making money?

David: Nothing. As far as we know, Jesus never takes issue with making money. And he never condemns the rich. But the sower throws his seed everywhere, even where it makes no sense to, even where the soil is clearly not rich but rocky. The sower won't discriminate, or protect, or pass judgment without mercy.

Katy: There's an equity about the sower. It's one thing to want rich soil, it's another thing to want to get rich off the soil, and still another thing to protect the rich soil when close to a billion people across the globe don't have enough food to live an active, healthy life.

Rhonda: While meanwhile 1.3 billion tons of food gets lost or wasted every year.

Paul: While meanwhile Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia, Uganda, Yemen, and Haiti are all categorized as "famished nations."

Katy: So why not make a change? Wouldn't the sower do better to talk about the need to make a system change, to improve access to food and education, to call for protecting the rich soil versus protecting the soil for the rich than to just go about tossing seed everywhere?

David: Yes, I suppose it would. In the meantime, though, you want everyone who can't get a piece of the good, rich soil to know they haven't been forgotten, that you're pleading their cause. Like a protest, like a sermon, you throw your seed in every possible direction to try and make something, anything, happen. And we tell ourselves that if we just stay at it long enough, eventually something will take.

Rhonda: That's why the sower scatters seed on the path and on the gravel? To say to those who must live in places of such hardness, where people only pass by but never stop, that in God's kingdom eventually everyone gets the same take?

Paul: Not eventually. Ultimately. Ultimately God deals in grace, where either everyone gets the same or it's not grace.

Katy: But in the story, everyone doesn't ultimately get the same. Study the story, says Jesus. The sower scatters the seed graciously, extravagantly, some might say with great hope and against all odds, but it's not enough. The seed takes root only 25% of the time. On the road, evil is right there alongside goodness, like a devil dancing on the other shoulder, just waiting to pluck up the seed the sower puts down. And more often than not it happens this way.

David: Yeah. We know all too well from experience that it does. After years of being in a gang, of a life pledged to loving your brothers by hating other brothers, a kid finally gets free of the streets, only to be found out by the gang again. He can survive just fine without their credibility, but they cannot survive without his. They pull him back in [snap] just like that. It's true, the bottle can get the addict again, the needle the junkie, the abused go back to their abuser. The seed can hit the ground and just like that [snap], get choked by a weed or swallowed by a bird. But that won't keep the sower from throwing down still right there on the street, where nothing beautiful is likely to grow but where the sower is going to try to anyway.

Katy: It's true that the worry of not having enough rich soil will cause some to fence their soil in. But right there, on the other side of the fence, where the property line meets the gravel of the road, the sower is going to throw down, reminding us that the kingdom of God is always bigger than the kingdoms of this world.

Paul: It's true that we will not always get the outcome we want, and sometimes even our best intentions will go to the birds. Life is hardly ever fair. "If you are kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives. Be kind anyway. If you are honest, people may cheat you. Be honest anyway. The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good. Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway."

Katy: Who said that?

Paul: Mother Teresa.

David: A sower went out to sow seed. It's true that as he scattered it, some fell on the road, some fell in gravel, some fell in the weeds, and some, only some, fell on good earth. But all of it was a sign of unrelenting grace, an invitation to a second, third, or fourth chance. A reminder that all is not lost. All is never lost. Reach over, pick up the seed. Or don't. Leave it there. You can come back years later and it just might be there still, now grown up with weeds all around it. But it will still be there...for you...or for anyone else who knows what a flower in the middle of weeds and gravel means.

Rhonda: What does it mean?

Paul: It means the sower was there. It means someone came before us, stood in the hard place where we now stand, and knows the struggle that comes with feeling like your soil maybe isn't good enough for growing anything worthwhile in this world. But they threw

down right there anyway, in hopes that anyone who came along after them would be inspired to do the same.

David: A sower went out to sow seed, says Jesus. Are you listening? They went everywhere.

Rhonda: They dropped seed everywhere.

Paul: They had hope in the redemption of everything.

Katy: They had love for everything and everyone.

David: And it completely changed the world, and the ending of the story.

Rhonda: It was beyond the sower's wildest dreams.

Paul: Grace can be that way.

Katy: Amen.

Rhonda: Amen.

David: Amen.