

Synod Online Worship  
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost  
12 July 2020

Beloved: grace, mercy and peace be yours and mine from God and our savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

As we hear again the familiar parable of the sower and the seed, it's good for us to be reminded that the parables of Jesus - when they were first heard - were heard in two ways. Some found the message offensive - and others found the message to be incredibly liberating, they heard them as good news as a sign of God's redeeming love - about how God cares for the whole of this world, not simply those who claim God's grace or favor.

Still, the offense in today's parable should be obvious to any of you who garden - and to any who have farmed or who are familiar with farming. Seed! Seed is a precious commodity. A serious farmer or even amateur gardener know that seed, which is expensive, is not something that you spread on rocky ground or cast indiscriminately on the pathways throughout your garden or the roadside next to acreage. No one intentionally sows seed in the midst of thistles, thorns or weeds. It's true, when you sow, be it by hand or by machine, some seed will fall in those places, but it is not something that you do deliberately.

What you do, deliberately, is sow seed in good ground. You sow it in those places that have been prepared, tilled, furrowed; places where you know the seed has a chance not only to germinate and sprout, but to take root and grow strong into a healthy plant - one that produces much fruit.

But today's parable casts a vision - a vision received as offense to some and hope for others - that God has a different system of sowing. And that system produces abundantly, the harvest that is produced far exceeds what could be reasonably expected even if all the seed landed in good soil. Let anyone with ears listen!

The seed in the parable of The Sower and the Seed is the Word of God it is the Word - or The Message - about God's kingdom. And the sower is God. But the seed is also the one who first tells us this story - the seed is Christ Jesus himself - who - as the scriptures tell us over and over again - came from God that we might have life and have it abundantly - the seed is the one whom we call the Living Word - the Word made flesh - who came, while we were yet estranged from God - Jesus gave us his life for us so that we might turn to God and live as God's beloved children in a world - and a heaven - made new - this seed is the one who invites and challenges us to do crazy things like love our enemies - and to pray for those who oppress us - and to bless those who curse us. - the seed is the one who accepts us and who wants to be planted deep in our hearts and to grow in our lives though we think that we are not good enough to approach or to ask for the hope - the love - the strength - and joy God gives in Jesus Christ.

While there may be limits to what we can do in sowing the word, limits to the energy and the love that we have for one another, limits that might cause us to try to sow in one place, but not in another; there is no limit to what God can do and what God does do. When God is the sower who sows in us and through us, that sense of limitedness is damned, and it is marvelous and amazing to witness what God does through us when God's word is in our lives, grows, takes root and produces fruit and harvest in abundance, working in us that which gives new life for us and for our neighbor. Let anyone with ears listen!

Let them hear that God is pouring out himself in abundance upon this world upon the rocky ground and the places that thistles grow and the pathways and the good soil and that at the end - when the

final reckoning is made - there will be an incredible harvest - a harvest so generous that the one who has sown so much seed so indiscriminately will be rewarded beyond anything one could reasonably hope for - even if all the soil had been good soil.

Let them hear too that we should not hoard the seed that God has given to us to sow; let them hear that God's purposes will not be frustrated if we waste a little bit of here and there, - that the word of God's love and care that we manifest in our actions and our attitudes and the words we speak will not be lost if we give it freely to the those who may allow it to be snatched away, or choked out, or to wither away... it won't be lost because the harvest that will come from all our acts of sowing the good news of Jesus Christ will be more, much more, than anyone can expect.

In the midst of multiple pandemics – Covid, rampant racism, hunger, unchecked white supremacy, partisan politics that cause gridlock, personal freedom over the needs of the common good, in the throes of thorns and thistles, the cares of the world and the lure of wealth, God in Jesus Christ continues to bring a harvest.

One of our small but mighty congregations, Amazing Grace on McElderry Street, has (with the help of significant community partnerships and Church friends, like the folks from St. John Sweet Air) had its feeding ministries continue to morph and mushroom into providing groceries, produce, perishables and hot meals for hundreds upon hundreds each week – and this week will cut the ribbon on its first affordable housing project; Good Shepherd in Wilmington, in a more affluent community, has leveraged its Shepherd's Garden to provide fresh foods for the local pantries by inviting their neighbors to come and leave their gifts at the altar, or at least in the bins, too; the North Avenue Mission, hardly a twinkle in their developer's eye as Covid began, got the church and community around co-creating Red Shed Village to house and provide for the most vulnerable in the midst of pandemic and are now a fully accredited ELCA worshipping community; Joy Reigns (Edgewater) provides for vulnerable infants and families, Grace in Westminster became a significant pop-up food distribution center, the pantry shelves at St. John (Pimlico), Immanuel (Manchester), Epiphany (Baltimore) and St. Stephen (Trolley Square) are laid bare and miraculously replenished week by week for their community, Breath of God Highlandtown has fed thousands hot meals and groceries, and Jerusalem Belair Road distributes five tons of food, twice a week, St. Paul in Cumberland has innovated ways to have their well-appreciated Bountiful Blessings feeding ministry go drive through – with intentional love and prayer, to go!; Zion, City Hall Plaza, First English, 39<sup>th</sup> Street, St. Marks St. Paul Street, and St. Philips Caroline Street partner with others to see that the needs of the neighbor continue to be met; Prince of Peace (Rosedale), Salem (Jarrettsville), Reformation (Milford) all valiantly provided child care for essential workers in the midst of stay-at-home orders; and so many others many others do small and big things, cultivating online community and risking something of yourselves in person, reminding the world that the church never closed. The seed continues to be sown. The Word goes forth. God brings a harvest – in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty and in another thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!

Beloved, let us not choose for others by denying to them what God has given to us, let us be wildly indiscriminate in how we share the good news, in how we love one another. This indeed is part of the harvest that good soil produces, abundant seed for the sower to sow once again and grain that is more than enough for all who hunger. Amen.

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