

Sowing Seeds in Hope

A Sermon by Rev. Katherine Schofield

Sunday, July 12, 2020

Sovereign. Shepherd. Teacher. Healer. There are many job descriptions that we assign to Jesus, but farmer – or sower of seeds, is rarely at the top of the list. And yet, as Jesus tells this story, the Parable of the Sower, he plants seeds - inspiration for a creation-centered revolution – hope for a future abundant harvest, the seeds of transformation to bring about God’s Kingdom on earth.

This parable, seems simple on the surface – it’s a lesson that begs the question (“what kind of soil are you? How can you become a well-tilled, well-weeded, well-fertilized field for the sowing of God’s love?), But, in truth, this parable contains multitudes. It’s a parable about parables, a lesson about learning, it’s a seed planted by the sower of the gospel – and if we prepare ourselves for it, if we cultivate it, if we can have ears to listen and hearts to understand – the lessons of this seed, the lessons of this sower, will yield an outlandish harvest of hope, grace, and transformation.

Now let’s be clear, the crowd who first heard this parable (probably thought Jesus was joking). What Jesus suggested to this peasant crowd would have been considered ludicrous. I mean, he proposed to these impoverished rural farmers (and fishers and craftspeople) that they *squander* seed! To take precious gleaned, cleaned, stored seed and sow it so recklessly that it falls on the path, in the rocky wastes and amongst thorns is prodigal at best and a very foolish farming strategy. It makes no economic sense. Who would sow seeds this way?

Of course Jesus isn’t joking. In his Jesus way he is simply turning the tables completely on agriculture as a transactional system. The crowds who were there with Jesus were experiencing the earliest days of Big-Agro Business. Cash crops were being consolidated into the hands of fewer wealthier landowners. They likely heard Jesus’ words with ears similar to our own, and began to ask of themselves the questions that often come up for us in hearing this story - “What kind of soil are you? Are you bringing in the best harvest of all that God has invested in you?” It’s the transactional model that we default to. God puts the seeds in our bank and we either invest them profitably or we don’t. We’re either fertile soil or we’re not. We’re either worth God’s word or we aren’t. Sound familiar? Well, sadly, it probably does, because this is the version of Christianity many of us were taught. “Are we good enough?” “Have we earned it?”

Rather than telling the story of a God who loves beyond belief, who scatters their word gracefully and wastefully, we’ve been taught a story about a God who, in a tight schoolmarm-ish manner, *tests* our ability to learn, our ability to listen, our ability to *change*.

But God is a prodigal sower. And that’s really the message, isn’t it? There’s plenty of grace for all. Take that in, my friends, please take it in. There’s plenty of grace for *you*. God sows their seeds wantonly, without judgment, and waits to see where they will sprout. And by sowing with such joyful abandon, they makes sure that growth *will* occur, even among those of us who are hard of hearing...

Now the gift of the parable is that once you think you’ve got the message sorted out you can flip it over, turn it around, and find something entirely new planted in the text.

We too are sowers. Sowers of the word of God's kingdom of justice and peace, of hope and love. As we seek to live out our faith we plant seeds along the way. When we care for our loved ones and support our friends we plant seeds of kindness. When we raise, and teach and bless our children we plant seeds of possibility. When we stand up, stand with, and advocate for what is right we plant seeds of transformation.

But at times we may look at the seeds we sow and wonder – will these ever grow? Are the conditions just too hard to overcome? Should I even waste my time?

It's clear that we are in the throes of multiple converging global crises. Health crisis, Climate Crisis, Hate Crisis, Migration Crisis, Criminal Justice Crisis, Daunting – daunting to even get up in the morning – let alone to hope of making a meaningful difference in addressing any of these crises. But a prodigal sower goes out to sow, and sows generously in hope.

As we strive as individuals and collectively as a church to address the Climate Crisis, we sow seeds through our individual and collective choices to be good stewards of our resources, but we also sow seeds through education and discussion, through advocacy on the state level, through get out the vote efforts nationally. And we sow prodigally – lots of ground cover – knowing too that the seed that falls on the hard path may not become a stock of wheat, but may become a mouse's lunch, that the seed choked by the weeds of bureaucratic red tape and environmental racism may be incorporated into the soil to nurture a future harvest. We sow the seeds even when we don't think our crop is producing any yield because, as Desmond Tutu so perfectly put it, "God without you will not, as you without God cannot". Our hope is rooted in God's promise that just when the pattern of defeat seems confirmed, a harvest will burst forth in abundance!

Our work to become more anti-racist, as individuals and as a church, follows a similar pattern. In every corner of this community seeds are being planted, seeds for learning, seeds for reflection, seeds that inspire action, seeds that push shoots through cracks in the centuries old pavement of racism, and colonialism, and Christian exceptionalism. We are learning about the challenges of the hard soil, the scorching sun, sharp thorns, but we also are learning more fully, the good news of the extravagant sower, that when we sow seeds of God's Kingdom in hope, a harvest will burst forth in abundance!

I'll close with words from the poem "This is What We Are About" by Bishop Ken Untener

We plant seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations
that need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects
beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything
and there is a sense of liberation
in realizing that.
This enables us to do something
and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning,
a step along the way,

an opportunity for God's grace
to enter and do the rest.