

Living into God's Gratuitous Giving

Matthew 13:1-9

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*God bless the truth that fights toward the sun,
they roll the lies over it and think that it is done.
It moves through the ground and reaches for the air,
and after a while it is growing everywhere,
and God bless the grass.*

From song God Bless the Grass by Malvina Reynolds

“A Sower went out to sow.” The Sower sowed on four different terrains. Only one terrain was good soil and brought forth grain. Easy peasy. Listen, Jesus is the sower, the seeds are the Gospel, and we are the soil. Try and become the good soil for the abundant outcome of the harvest or the coming of God's kingdom. End of sermon.

Is it really this simple? Should I go on about how we can become fertile ground or at least not sinful rocky ground? I'd rather not. Instead, I would like to talk to you about how this parable relates to the political, economic, and social reality present at the time of Jesus and then I want to shift to what if the Sower is not Jesus but God.

When Jesus started his parable with “A sower went out to sow” the hearers knew what would happen with the harvest because they knew the harvest belonged to the elite. They were farmers---the working poor. They knew the story because it was imprinted into their aching hands.

In the Galilee under Caesar and the Herods, the Galilean peasants lived under a heavy system of tribute and taxes that were extracted from the surplus of the harvest. Most did not own their land so also had to pay rent for leased land. And on top, they had to pay tithes to the Temple in Jerusalem. The Parable of the Sower is a story about this life of suffering, abuse of power, high taxes, tithes, and choices; it depicts the everyday life of the peasantry in 1st century Galilee, says Bible scholar Ernest Van Eck.

Let's talk about the details then from the historical Jesus perspective. The path and the birds represent the roads created to take the grain back to Rome or other parts of the empire. The roads siphoned off the wealth, of the farmers which was made worse by the birds who also came to devour the seeds. And the rocky places are the lands mostly left for the peasants to grow what they can for their families, their harvest always at risk because it was difficult to be rooted in a land where you couldn't put down roots. And the thorns, well you guessed it, these are the tithes that must be given for the temple. The peasant farmers told Jesus, "Preach it now."

But then the story turns. The good news is that many seed fall on the good soil that yield 30-, 60-, and 100-fold. This is the small amount of land that belong to the peasants who share their seeds and leftovers with the poor gleaners. The kingdom of God becomes visible here. The soil is good because the harvest is shared.

In a world with little choice, the parable gives a vision on how to cope in an exploitative world. In the words of Sawicki, a biblical scholar: "Jesus' first followers knew that there was no escape, no place to go to get away from the civil and personal evils confronting them. They had to figure out how to live in a landscape compromised by colonial oppressions. They would seek and find God's kingdom precisely in the midst of that."

In a world of imperial power, Jesus tells his hearers how to find and live in a world where imperial coins depict those in power as the ones who own the harvest and feed their subjects. The good news subverts this reality. It begins by acknowledging that the harvest belongs to God, and God is in control of the harvest when it is shared with others. When shared, everyone will have enough and receive 'hundred fold'.

Do we have ears to hear this good news this morning? The news that the grass and the truth will break through because the harvest belongs to God. The world does not belong to the ruling powers, a former President, or even the department of justice. It belongs to God.

Dear Ones, as difficult as it has been to watch the January 6 hearings, are we not watching in slow painful motion the detailed account of how Trump tried to sow a Big Lie in order to hold onto power? Yet like grass growing up between the cracks in a sidewalk, we are also watching how the truth is fighting to be heard, to be brought to the light. The truth is moving through the ground of our democratic system searching for someone to give it air.

Thank God for scattering seeds everywhere including into the hearts of some of our lawmakers who drew the line when asked to break the law or lie. Let anyone who has ears to hear, act to save our democracy.

Dear Ones, it has also been soul crushing, depressing, and despairing to watch the dismantling of our reproductive rights by the Supreme Court of the land this week. This is so much more than just banning abortions. It is the taking away of our human rights to choose to have children or not. It is discriminatory in its reach and will change the lives of many black, brown, indigenous and LGBTQ women and their families. In addition, Carlos A. Rodriguez reminds us:

Let us also remember that Jesus protected women. Empowered women. Honored women publicly. Released the voice of women. Confided in

women. Was funded by women. Celebrated women by name. Learned from women. Respected women. And spoke of women as examples to follow.

Our turn.

Thank God for scattering seeds everywhere for we who believe in freedom will not rest. We will rise up wherever and whenever we can against this latest attack on our rights. Let anyone who has ears to hear, join in the fight for freedom.

Finally, Dear Ones, God loves their children. We are called this Pride Sunday to celebrate God's inclusive love. We do this by supporting diversity and protecting everyone's right to choose their sexual identity and their partners. Love is love. **Thank- you God for scattering the seeds everywhere** so we can see your image in all we meet. Embolden us to stand against any legislation that seeks to limit your love. We have answered your call to be an Open and Affirming church. Let anyone who has ears to hear, shout out, "We see you and we will stand with you."

Dear Ones, all the terrains are God's. Who are we to tell God what "good soil" looks like? Who are we to decide who is worthy or not of the Sower's generosity?

So church, how are we following in the footsteps of this generous sower? How are we at scattering seed before and after us in the widest arc our arms can make? How are we expressing lavish love even while working hard on becoming a more anti-racist church? How are the people inside and outside the church experiencing us as we tend to the rocky and thorny places in ourselves and our community? Are we as versed in calling in people in love as we are in calling them out to change?

Dear Ones, you are invited to sow seeds of love, mercy, justice, humility, and truthfulness. Let them fall through your fingers so that even the birds, the

rocks, and the thorns and the shallow sun scorched parts of our world will still burst into joyous life.

The imprudent generosity of the sower reveals a God who gives without considering the worthiness of the recipient. This apparent lack of taste travels from the sower and permeates the seed, growing in us a word that uproots our deepest assumptions about what is prudent and who is deserving. God's generous giving of self makes the stinginess of our self-protection that much more evident. If we embrace God's gratuitous giving, we come to recognize our very selves as lavish gifts from God. The Word sown and grown within sends us out like water onto dry ground as living words of promise and hope. We don't get to choose how and where we bless, and yet we are assured that we will not return to our sender empty.

Let those who have ears to hear and hearts broken open, err on the side of extravagance and wastefulness and join the Sower in creating the great harvest, the kin-dom come on earth as it is already in heaven.