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St. James', Mt. Airy
7/16/17

Pentecost 6/Proper 10A
Genesis 25:19-34
Psalm 119:105-112
Romans 8:1-11
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;
take our hands and work through them;
take our hearts and set them on fire.
Amen.**

We are fully into the long green season of the church year. Properly called the season after Pentecost – sometimes called ordinary time – my favorite name is the green growing time.

How fitting that name is for this week's Gospel reading – reminding us that God is always planting and nurturing in our lives.

Our parable today is commonly known as the Parable of the Sower. It is perhaps ironic then, that more often than not, reflection on this passage focuses on the different types of soil – due in large part to the “teaching” on the original parable Jesus told that the author of the Gospel likely tacked on to explain it.

It is rife with application: What kind of soil are we? What kind of soil are other people? How can we be the good soil? Etc., etc.

And that's interesting, but it's not called the Parable of the Soil, is it? Nope, it's called the Parable of the Sower – and what I find most interesting is this wild gardener that sows seeds in such a seemingly careless way, scattering them everywhere they walk. I wonder, what does it mean that they sow in such a way?

The first time I planted my own garden was the spring after we bought our first house in California. Being a novice, the first thing I did was hire a professional gardener to help me out – not only with the hard work of transforming a sadly neglected back yard into something less jungle and more toddler friendly, but also to learn exactly now one is supposed to, well, garden.

What kind of plants should go where – sun, partial sun, shade? How often do you need to water things? When you do need to fertilize? What needs to be pruned and how often? What is deadheading? And because I was on a budget, and seeds were less expensive than plant starts, how do you actually plant seeds?

I read the little instructions on the back of every seed package like they were the gospel, literally, and took copious notes from John (my gardener) in a gardening journal. I learned that nasturtium seeds need to be planted about ½ inch deep and 2 inches apart. Later I learned that they will take over everything when they grow, which is why they are called ‘nastys.’ I learned that carrots should be planted at ¼ inch depth and spaced ½ inch apart – though with seeds that small it escaped me how you could be so precise.

And then my gardener, John, taught me the sowing technique called broadcasting. We mixed together three different kinds of poppy seeds to plant as a border against a retaining wall. We then walked up and down the wall, basically scattering the seed over the desired area, and when we were done we finished by scattering a thin layer of topsoil over the seeded area.

As I read today’s Gospel, all of this is what came to mind. And then the questions started.

What kind of gardener pays no attention to where the seeds go? And if they were so careless in how they sowed them, who's to say they didn't mix together different kinds of seeds, heedless of what should be planted where?

What are we to make of such a gardener?

The wide and wild broadcasting of the seed in this parable is indicative of God's abundance. It tells us that there really is enough – enough grace, enough justice, enough blessing, enough everything – to go around. It tells us that what we have been freely given, we must also give freely.

God scatters seed wildly, without reading the package that the seeds came in for specific instructions about how to sow them, without worrying about mixing different kinds of seeds together in a *mélange* of grace, without checking the quality of the soil first and without finding out how deserving the soil might be of receiving seeds. God just sows everywhere – a sign of divine trust.

The simple fact is that God doesn't work the way we work. God works not only in seeds and soil, but in mystery and miracle.

Consider this story:

A woman had a dream one night that she walked into a new store, and to her surprise she found God behind the counter. "What do you sell here?" she asked. "Everything your heart desires," said God. "Everything."

Hardly daring to believe what she was hearing, the woman decided to ask for the best things a human could wish for. "I'll take some peace of mind, and love, and happiness, and wisdom, and freedom from fear," she said.

Then as an afterthought, she added, "Not just for me. For everyone on earth." God smiled and said, "I think you've got me wrong, my dear. We don't sell the fruits here. We only sell the seeds."¹

If you want the fruits of love, compassion, mercy, justice, peace, and reconciliation, you have to sow those seeds in your life and the world around you.

So what seeds do you sow? And how are you sowing them?

Are any of us as careless and extravagant as the gardener from the parable?

Or do we pick and choose the soil, following human rules for how we are to plant?

God sows everywhere. And I believe that is what we are called to as well.

I believe we are called to gather into our pockets a mixture of seeds – each of us will have a different mix and that's perfectly fine – that is a part of the fruits of the Spirit after all. I believe that once we have chosen which seeds we think are most important, our very lives should be the broadcasting of those seeds.

We should be intentional, but not limiting. That is – we need to prayerfully consider what seeds we will sow and how our lives will sow them – but just like the gardener, we must sow seeds wherever we might be – at all times, in all places – and trust that God can use seeds sown anywhere for the furthering of God's reign.

¹ George Rink, *Homilies from the Heart*.

My prayer for all of us is that we may live into God's abundance, and that by doing so, we may share that abundance with others. My hope is that we will broadcast the seeds of God's grace, love and justice everywhere we go. My faith tells me this community will change the world by doing just that.

~ AMEN ~