

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 call today's Gospel reading 'The Parable of the Sower,' even though the part most of us tend to focus on is the different kinds of soil.

Paying attention to the soil is an easy leap for reflecting about whether we are we a path, or thorns, or rocks, or good soil – which is all well and good. But we call it the Parable of the Sower for a reason – at its center, this is a story about a gardener who sows seeds in a seemingly careless way, scattering them everywhere he walks.

What's up with that?

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I remember the first time that I planted a real garden as an adult. My Mom is a great flower and landscape gardener, and I learned some from her, but this was going to be a vegetable garden with fruit trees. It took a lot of effort to prepare the soil, and then when faced with fresh beds I had so many questions.

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

I read the little instructions on the back of every seed package like it was the Gospel, literally, and took copious notes from a professional gardener in my parish in my new gardening journal. I learned that scarlet runner beans need to be planted about 1 inch deep and 3 inches apart. I learned that carrots should be planted at $\frac{1}{4}$ inch depth and spaced $\frac{1}{2}$ inch apart – though with seeds that small it escaped me how you could be so precise.

And then I learned something entirely different, the sowing technique called broadcasting. With this method you scatter seeds over the desired area and then place a thin layer of topsoil over them. This was how I planted a mix of poppies along the front of a small retaining wall.

As I read today's Gospel, these memories came to mind. How much effort was put into preparing the beds, yes, but mostly the actual planting itself.

And it raised even more questions about this sower we read about! What kind of gardener first pays no attention to the soil, but even more so, **how** the seeds are planted?

What are we to make of such a gardener?

The simple fact is that God doesn't work the way we work, which is what this parable is pointing us to. God works not only in seeds and soil, but also in mystery and miracle.

Consider this story:

A woman had a dream one night – that she walked into a store and to her surprise 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. “I think you’ve got me wrong, my dear,” God said, “We don’t sell the fruits here. We only sell the seeds.”

It’s not that the fruits aren’t important – we only have to think on all the passages about the fruits of the Spirit to know that. No, it’s that in order to get such fruits, we have to first actually sow the seeds.

It’s a work of love, and we can easily be distracted from it.

A term that I read in a parenting book once referred to ‘accidental parenting.’ These are the patterns and habits we slip into, not always with the consequences we want, when we aren’t intentional about what we say to our kids and how we instruct them.

The correlation for me here is that while there are times that I am intentional about what seeds I am trying to sow and tend, to be honest, much of the time I am too focused on the here and now to pay attention to the garden.

I think I am not alone, and that many of us are probably ‘accidental sowers.’ But are any of us as careless as the gardener we hear about today?

God the sower scatters seed wildly, without reading the package for specific instructions, without worrying about mixing different kinds of seeds together, without checking the quality of the soil, and without testing to see how deserving the soil might be of receiving seeds in the first place.

God simply sows everywhere. And though we are not God, this is what we are called to do as well.

To gather into our pockets a mixture of seeds – each of us will have a different mix and that's perfectly fine. Maybe mine is justice and compassion, and yours in mercy and grace. No matter, because once we have chosen which seeds we think are most important, our very lives should be the broadcasting of those seeds everywhere we go, in every type of soil, trusting that God can use seeds sown anywhere for the furthering of God's reign.

This wide broadcasting of seeds over all types of ground is grounded in trusting God's abundance. It tells us that there really is enough, that our faith is enough, that we ourselves are enough. It tells us that what we have been freely given, we must also freely give.

My prayer for all of us is that we may trust in the abundance of God, and that by doing so, we may share that abundance with others. My hope is that we will broadcast the seeds of the Gospel wherever we go. And my faith tells me when we do that, we can change the world. Amen.