

**Year A: Proper 10b Gen 25:19-34; Ps 119:105-112; Rom 8:1-11; Mt 13:1-9, 18-23  
St. Barnabas, Florissant – July 12, 2020**

**Focus Sentence:** The God of abundance scatters seed almost wastefully, irresponsibly.

### **SERMON**

**I offer these thoughts in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit....**

This morning's passage from Matthew's Gospel is a very familiar one, one which we've heard countless times. For centuries, it's been known as the Parable of the Sower, no doubt from the opening line: "A sower went out to sow." And I'm sure that the many sermons you've heard preached on this parable have left you with the definite impression that we listeners are to be the "good soil." We're to be that good soil which receives God's word (the seed), understands it, works to allow it to take root within us, and then bears much fruit. Fruit that leads to change and transformation in us, and in the world around us.

I wonder, though, if rather this shouldn't be called the Parable of the Seed, or the Parable of the Soil, since so much of Jesus' explanation of it speaks of the seed, and the soil into which the seed falls. But, of course, Jesus himself says, "Hear then the parable of the sower." Since I'm not about to contradict Jesus here, we can shift gears a bit, focus more on the behavior of the sower, and learn something about this Sower.

### **PAUSE**

It would seem that the Sower in this parable is somewhat irresponsible, or even wasteful. I mean this Sower just seems to fling the seeds everywhere, not really caring much where they fall. Maybe the Sower really is aiming for good soil, but an awful lot of the seed ends up elsewhere

Apparently, in ancient Palestine, the method of planting was different from how we do it today. Back then, seed was first scattered on what was presumed to be good, deep soil, amongst lots of rocky and thorny ground, and afterwards it would be plowed or worked into that soil. Today, of course, we prepare the ground ahead of time, by plowing or working the soil, and only then do we plant the seeds.

Interestingly, the word *parable*, *parabolè* in Greek, literally means “to throw alongside.” And that almost seems a good description of what our Sower is doing.

In any case, my limited experience with gardening involves giving seeds the best chance they can have. Today, we’re pretty careful to avoid pathways, rocky soil, or thorns. We plant seeds in cultivated ground that’s well worked and ready to nurture and grow the seeds that are planted in it.

## **PAUSE**

Of course, nature seems to operate quite differently. The wind blows seeds from trees, or those feathery dandelion seeds, all over the place --- yes, sometimes into good soil, but often into places where they don’t stand a chance. Insects cross-pollinate, birds eat seeds and drop them here and there as they fly around. Fruit falls from trees and vines and cracks open to expose seeds that may or may not go on to bear more fruit.

The Sower from our parable, then, seems to operate a lot more like nature than like an experienced human farmer or gardener, at least as we know them today. And maybe this is how the original Gardener, the God of Genesis, who walks in the Garden or Eden, actually works. To us it seems wasteful and irresponsible to just scatter seeds everywhere. But our God is a God of abundance, a God of grace and mercy and love. So maybe this is exactly the right way to sow our seeds.

I mean, just look around the next time you take a walk. You may well see flowers blooming from cracks in sidewalks where all kinds of people walk every day. You might see vines climbing the walls of empty brick buildings where the sun seldom shines. “Good soil,” then, that fosters growth and fruit might be found in places where we’re not expecting it, or in places that WE haven’t cultivated.

## **PAUSE**

Someone has asked the question: What if churches stepped outside their church buildings, scattering seed to every corner of their communities? What might be the possibilities if our ministries extended far beyond the walls of our sanctuaries and fellowship halls?

Some churches have partnered with non-profits that work to transform the lives of those on the margins of society, persons living at risk and in poverty. Those non-profits are often NOT faith-based, but they’re already doing the work of a good sower. In our secular society, sowers, seeds, and good soil might never darken the doors of a church, so we have to be creative and go beyond our walls and into places wherever God’s work is already being done.

## **PAUSE**

The Parable of the Sower thus challenges the church and its leaders to scatter our seed broadly and widely, but maybe it also challenges the powers and principalities of this world. Most Christians would agree that one role of government is to provide at least some degree of help to those in dire need: benefits for those who’ve just lost their jobs, food for hungry families, a safety net for those of us who are most vulnerable. But, in practice, don’t we often prefer to save those resources for those we consider to be

the most worthy --- the “good soil?” For example, many Christians apparently favor drug-testing for welfare recipients, even though we’ve seen many times that the cost of this testing far outweighs any savings.

The message from that attitude seems clear enough: help should only come to the deserving, and those in power get to decide who’s deserving enough. We spend millions of dollars and thousands of hours trying to regulate how, and on whom, public money is spent. Of course, the need for fiscal responsibility is real, but the Parable of the Sower seems to contradict that kind of careful and calculated regulation.

If you recall the message from two weeks ago, when we examined the whole concept of “grace,” we concluded that grace is a free gift from a loving God, and that it’s nothing we can earn or “deserve.” And our lesson this morning seems to be that God gives freely, hoping to find some good soil here and there, but with no guarantees that this will happen. This kind of lavish abundance, grossly distributed grace, just might be a call and a challenge for us to go and do likewise.

**AMEN.**

[adapted from Joann H. Lee’s “Reflections on the Lectionary,” *Christian Century*, June 21, 2017.]