

## The Reckless Sower and the Miraculous Seed

"The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth."

That's a quote from the famous physicist (and part time philosopher) Niels Bohr. When he was later asked about this quote, he sort of dismissed it as more of a joke than anything else. But regardless of whether he was joking or not, I think there is profound truth in this statement.

"The opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth."

Last week, Shelly preached from this same scripture with an emphasis on the soil. In her interpretation, the sower in the parable represents God who extravagantly scatters seed everywhere. God's love, God's grace, God's hope is available to all...no matter what. But as the parable teaches us, not every place is receptive to the seed. So if the sower represents God, the soil is us.

Shelly's message asks of us, "What can we do to cultivate our hearts and minds so that we might be good soil where the love and hope of God's seed can take root? How can we cultivate our lives so that we live out of a reality of love, of forgiveness, of hope, of peace?"

Profound truth.

But it's not the only profound truth. In fact, one of the points of parables is that they are multi faceted and nuanced and layered. You can't boil a parable down to a single, solitary truth. I think that's one reason why Jesus so often taught in parables because matters about God, about faith, about the relationship between the human and divine can never be boiled down to a simple truth claim. There are profound truths found in multiple perspectives.

That's why we are choosing to sit with this same story throughout the month of July because there are so many different lessons we can take from this story. And with parables, one way to lean into the different layers, is to look at these stories from a particular perspective of someone or something in the parable. Last week, we read this parable from the perspective of the soil. So today, I want to offer another perspective on this parable. What if instead of imagining ourselves as the soil, we instead imagine ourselves as the sower scattering seed? What if we are the ones who seemingly waste  $\frac{3}{4}$  of our seed on bad ground?

Jesus' hearers in rural Palestine, where many worked the land, would have had some serious questions about the recklessness of this sower. Was he not looking where he scattered the seed? How could he afford to be so wasteful that he would throw most of his seed on ground where it had virtually no chance of bringing forth fruit? Either this sower was the worst farmer in the world, or he trusted enough in the miracle of life that he was willing to be surprised.

I love to hike – it's my favorite thing to do. About 20 years ago, I was able to go to Bryce Canyon in Utah. It gets less than 17 inches of rain per year. The ground is made up almost entirely of rock. And yet, life happens. Trees grow, their roots snaking around the amazing rock

formations, finding any soil and water they can. In one of the most unlikely places for life, trees grow. Maybe the sower understood that life can happen even in the most unlikely of places and that betting on life is always worth the risk of wasting seed.

My favorite part of Shelly's sermon last week was when she talked about how God scatters seed everywhere.

This sower, this God sows seeds everywhere:

- in a garden called Eden
- with a rainbow following a great flood
- in places of exile and wilderness
- in manna dropping from the sky—over and over and over again!
- through prophets and psalmists
- in the audacity of incarnation
- at a wedding in Cana
- while welcoming children
- engaging women in conversation and as disciples
- on mountain tops and level places
- at tables with endless guest lists
- on, and at the foot of, a crude Roman cross
- in a damp cave-like tomb
- in resurrection after resurrection after resurrection . . .
- in rooms and hearts locked in fear of any number of things
- in doubting disciples: then and now
- on a path—a road—to Emmaus
- on a road to Damascus

Friends, we are no doubt the soil. But we are also the sower, called to do the same work of God in the world. We are called to scatter seeds of love, mercy, hope, justice, and peace just as extravagantly as God has sown seeds in us. But sadly, throughout history, the Christian Church has too often thought it's job was to try to pick out the good soil rather than scattering seed everywhere.

Do you know what I mean?

How many times throughout the history of the church have Christian leaders said that group of people are particularly sinful? How many people have been completely turned off from religion because they've felt judged? Maybe some of you have been harmed in this way and it's a miracle you still show up to church at all.

Far too often the Christian Church has tried to judge what people and communities represented good soil rather than trusting in the miracle of the seed and be willing to be surprised at where life may flourish.

And that's why I think the example of the sower is so important for us. The way the sower scattered his seed was meant to be shocking for Jesus' audience. This is not the behavior of a careful farmer. And that is precisely the point. This is the teaching moment in the story.

It is never ever our job to determine what is good soil and what isn't. It is our job to scatter seed.

We are called to love all...no matter what.

We are called to work for equality and justice for all...no matter what.

We are called to serve and care for others...no matter what.

This is a pumpkin seed. When I hold a seed, it blows my mind that this tiny little thing has within it the potential for so much life. That this tiny thing can turn into a large pumpkin. Even in the very best of conditions, with the most fertile soil, with plenty of sun, with the right amount of water, I am still amazed at what this seed can turn into. It's a miracle.

Wendell Berry writes, "Ordinary miracles on earth come from heaven with extraordinary love and beauty. The miraculous is not the extraordinary but the common mode of existence. It is our daily bread."

Friends, maybe as much as anything, the tendency to try to define what is good soil and what isn't is that so often, judgmental forms of religion try to substitute certainty for wonder, narrowness for mystery, and judgment for miraculous grace. The sower of Jesus' parable trusted in the miracle of the seed without feeling the need to control where it landed.

The rest of the pumpkin seeds are in a bowl here on the altar table and if you'd like, take a seed with you as a reminder of the reckless sower. Whether you keep it to hold in your hands from time to time, or whether you plant it in the ground or whether you fling it in your yard – whatever you do, do something that will remind you that this seed contains within it the ordinary miracle of life that always has the potential to surprise us in the most beautiful of ways. And precisely because miracles are never meant to be contained or explained, whenever you think of this seed, may you also think of the reckless, extravagant sower and remember that God calls us to follow his example.

May we love extravagantly.

May we forgive extravagantly.

May we care for others extravagantly.

And may we keep our eyes open to the miracles of life that happen all the time all around us if we just take time to pay attention.

Amen.