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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
6th Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 10/Year A
July 16, 2017
Text: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

*“Jesus told them many things in parables, saying:
“Listen! A sower went out to sow.”*

By the 13th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has become well known throughout the nearby cities and villages. Many who followed him have seen and experienced his acts of mercy, how he cured lepers, raised the sick from their beds and brought the dead back to life. As he travelled from place to place, Jesus taught his disciples and the crowds many things-things like God's goodness, how to go about their daily life and work, care for their neighbor and love their enemies, and even how to pray. His messages were clear and spoken in a way that most would understand. No one needed to have a year or two in rabbinical school or seminary. Many were drawn to him, the crowds swelling so much so that in today's gospel, Jesus finds himself teaching from a boat while the people gathered along the shore.

Jesus had already picked up John the Baptizer's announcement about the nearness of the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God. And as his time to go to Jerusalem draws closer there is an urgency about it.

Today's parable is the first of many stories that Jesus told to them so that they might better get a picture of the kingdom of God-a kingdom that exists on earth as it does in heaven. Over and over again he would use images that most of his listeners would be able to relate to. “The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, like treasure in a field, like yeast, like a great pearl, like a net let down in the sea.”

The Parable of the Sower is a familiar one to us. A sower goes out to throw seeds and scatters seed everywhere. Now clearly this sower has no farming technique whatsoever. None. Zilch. Nada.

I am sure that many of us have travelled along stretches of roads and highway and observed neatly sown rows of corn or grapevines or cotton, fruit trees and vegetation of all kinds. Each thing planted in a carefully prepared and defined area. If we ourselves have ever planted a garden we know that we took the time to methodically prepare the soil and map out where each seed or seedling was to go.

But not this farmer! The seed is scattered everywhere! Some of it falls on hard ground, clearly exposed and is immediately snatched away by birds. Some of it falls on ground full of gravel and little soil. The seed grows up but quickly dies from lack of nourishment. The tender plants wither away. Some of the seeds fell among the thorns and the thorns eventually choked the plants and they died. And the last of the seed fell on good rich soil and luscious plants grew.

We hear this story and it is easy enough to wonder which soil we might be. We know the beaten path of life and what it is to be packed down. At some point we've stumbled through the rocky patches of life. We have been bruised and scratched by the thorns of life. And we have known the experience of having our feet firmly planted in good spaces and all is right with the world.

If we hear this parable and equate it with the seed being the Word of God again we might wonder what kind of soil we are. Are we that hard, rocky and thorny soil where nothing will grow or are we the well-weeded and fertilized soil? Are we among the hard soil people who hear the Word of God, but do not take it to heart? Are we the rocky soil people where the seed of God blossoms for a while but then we get bored and move on? Are we among those who hear the Word of God but then we get tangled up and distracted by worldly things?

We could leave things just like this: Be good dirt. The end. But Jesus did not introduce this parable saying: 'This is the kind of soil the sower had to work with. This is the kind of dirt you should be.' He said: "*Listen! A sower went out to sow.*"

With any parable that Jesus taught there are always more layers than first meets our hearing.

You see, we hear this parable and think it is a story all about us.

This story is less about us and more about the kingdom of God and in particular-it is a story about who God is. The really bad sower is what God is like: a benevolent Sower who since the beginning of creation has cast bountiful seeds of goodness and grace upon everything and everyone that has been and ever will be

created. A gracious Sower who is not stingy with his seed but who casts it freely. A magnificent Sower who doesn't distinguish between good soil and not so good soil. No ground and no one is undeserving of God's seeds, of God's blessings that scatter to the far reaches of the earth. This goes along with what Jesus told the crowds earlier in Matthew's Gospel, "*He (God) makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous (Mt. 5:45).*"

Later Jesus says: "*Let anyone with ears listen.*"

If we have heard this parable, we will find that there is yet another layer that we should consider. That as Christians we are not off the hook when it comes to sowing seed. Part of the plan is that as followers of Christ, we too, are to announce that God's kingdom is right here in our midst. And we are to sow God's Word in the places we go and to everyone we meet. Here, there, and everywhere. In our homes, our work places, in our families. It is not up to us to determine whether others' soil is arid or rocky or threatened with thorns or by hungry birds. It is not up to us to determine who is worthy or less worthy of the gift that is sown.

We are to simply sow and let the Master Sower do the rest.

Amen.