

July 12, 2026 - Trinity Episcopal Church - 7th Pentecost

Rev. Elizabeth Molitors

***Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.”
Genesis 25:31***

***A sower went out to sow.
Matthew 13:3b***

Our first and last readings today — the Hebrew scripture passage from Genesis and the parable from Matthew — are curious bookends, presenting two contrasting, distinctly different worldviews.

In Genesis, we meet Jacob, the son of Isaac, who was the son of Abraham. Jacob, heir to God’s promise to Abraham to give Abraham descendants too numerous to count. Jacob comes from a storied lineage, and yet the first story we hear about *him* has him taking advantage of his twin brother’s vulnerability (his extreme hunger), withholding food from Esau until Esau gives up his birthright — his right, as the older twin, to inherit a larger portion of their father’s estate when Abraham dies.

Jacob’s worldview is one of scarcity: there’s only so much to go around — only one *pie*, if you will — so you better get what you can get while the getting is good. For Jacob, life is survival of the

fittest, a dog-eat-dog world, and a contest over who gets the biggest slice of the pie. Jacob is shrewd and calculating: he sees an opportunity to get what he wants — the financial benefits which, in that time and culture, were meant to go to the firstborn son — he sees what he wants and does whatever he needs to do to get it.

And this wouldn't be the last time that Jacob acts by way of deceit or trickery or cheating. A few chapters later in this story, when a frail, almost-blind Isaac is on his deathbed, Jacob deceives his father, disguising himself as his brother, lying about who he is, and tricking his father into bestowing on him a blessing that is meant for Esau.

Jacob is not a terribly appealing or sympathetic character, is he? (And yet I really have to admire these ancient storytellers for presenting their story figures fully, warts and all.)

By contrast, the sower in Matthew's parable is all about abundance. He doesn't seem to be an orderly kind of farmer, making sure his field is properly plowed and the soil amended just right, planting seeds at depths just so, dropping one or two into each hole and covering them carefully with dirt.

No, the sower in Jesus' parable is a lavish — almost reckless — field planter, throwing seeds all over the place indiscriminately, like parade-goers throwing confetti. He *sees* the reality of the world, the rocks and the weeds and the barren places, and throws the seed anyway. Seeds, which are themselves the very embodiment of abundance: little bundles of potential and possibility, little bundles of “more.” Who knows what might happen when and where they land?

(And now is the time when I need to point out, as I do every three years when this section of Matthew pops up in our lectionary cycle, to point out that this is NOT a parable about how to make ourselves into better soil. That second paragraph of the gospel, there in your bulletin, is likely, biblical scholars say, an add-on. Jesus frequently taught using parables: open narratives which invited the listener to engage with the stories, to think about them in light of their own context, and challenged the listener to see the world in a new way. So, given that, why would Jesus start out telling a parable, and then turn around a minute later and say, “*Now, the moral of the story is...*” That would eliminate the need for his listeners to do any thinking on their own. Also, Jesus' opening line — his statement sentence — tells us what his emphasis is: A SOWER went out to sow. This is a parable that wants us to consider what it is the *sower* is doing.)

So, back to our sower... The seeds the sower is sowing are not only abundant, but exponential, multiplicative: if you plant *a* tomato seed, you get a plant, which bears multiple tomatoes, each of which contains dozens, if not hundreds, of seeds, each of which can create another plant with yet more tomatoes and more seeds, and on and on.

This is God's economy. *This* is God's way of being in the world. Finding ways to grow more of the things that our world needs, so that everyone and everything can flourish.

As we consider the two competing worldviews our scriptures present to us this morning, we need to ask ourselves, How then shall we live? As pie-dividers or field planters?

So many of our current public debates get framed as pie-dividing issues: one fixed-sized pie, and everyone's scrambling for their piece, and you better act soon and aggressively, else you lose out. The -isms and -phobias of our culture — racism, sexism, ableism, Christian nationalism, homophobia, xenophobia — draw us into suspicion and fear, and fear begets scarcity, and scarcity leads us back into the struggle to get that biggest slice.

It's exhausting. It's dispiriting.

The gospel, though, repeatedly invites us to consider the alternative: what would become possible if we looked at the world the way the sower does — as a place of abundant harvest. While it won't eliminate real conflicts over truly limited resources, it might change the posture with which we enter into them. Instead of asking, "How do I secure my share?" we ask, "How might we partner with God to enlarge the possibilities for everyone's flourishing?"

This week, as I've been thinking about these two alternative worldviews, I've found myself on the lookout for how these things show up in real life. The scarcity / pie-divider model isn't hard to find, in everything from social media posts demonizing Somali kindergarten students in Minneapolis, to policies — proposed and underway — designed to disenfranchise voters. And these are just a couple of examples among many.

But there were lots of field planter examples that came to mind, as well. I was remembering my grandparents, who were given to random and frequent acts of generosity, even though they were of modest means. They couldn't pass by a kid-run lemonade stand at the side of the road without stopping to make a purchase.

If a high school sports team was putting on a car wash in their school's parking lot as a fundraiser, my grandma would pull in and make a donation (even if her car sometimes looked worse after the car wash than before). And for years, my grandfather was part of a group through his church that looked after widows in the area, doing odd jobs and home repairs for no charge.

I went with some Trinity folks to Pasadena on Saturday, to be part of the service to ordain and consecrate our new bishop, Antonio Gallardo. On our drive back to Santa Barbara, we talked about the parts of the service that especially stood out for us. We talked about the opening procession, the seemingly endless flow of people into the church — the choirs, the drummers, the flags, the presenters, the priests and deacons and bishops. We talked about how so many languages and cultures were represented in the music, in the preaching, and in the prayers. We talked about the energy and the joy, alongside the solemnity and the silences held to make space for the Holy Spirit.

Was it all too much, I asked my car mates? Were you wanting it to be over? NO, they replied — they wanted more, wanted it to keep going. So many seeds. God the sower walking amongst us, flinging seeds everywhere.

Jacob's worldview was such that all he could see was a bowl of stew and a birthright. Jesus saw a handful of seed and imagined a harvest beyond counting, a kingdom where fruitfulness multiplies. The question for us as Christ followers is not about whether we bargain fairly or not over dividing up a scarce pie. It is about whether our imaginations have been converted—from the scarcity that pits brother against brother to the abundance that trusts God's ability to bring forth life where we may see only limits.

A sower went out to sow, and as she sowed, some seeds fell on a hard path and others fell on rocky ground, and still others were scorched by the sun. Some fell on good soil, too. But the sower paid absolutely no attention to any of it, didn't get distracted or worried about the soil, because the sower wasn't looking down; the sower had a job to do. The sower went out to sow, dipping a hand into the bag of seed she'd been given, intent on her purpose, to fling those little packets of life and possibility as far as she could possibly throw, and waited to see what might grow. **Amen.**

