

Sermon: Proper 10A

Title: Jesus the Good Sower

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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord. Amen.

I want to preface anything I am about to say with the following disclaimer: I. Am. Not. A. Gardener. I can do many things in this world, some perfectly, others adequately, and yet others fall in the “good enough” category. Way below that category is the “don’t ever do this” category. And gardening falls into that for me. I should not be left alone with plants, if you want them to continue to survive.

For instance, I have yet to keep a house plant alive. Not my forte. When I started working in the Diocesan Office, there was a green plant, affectionately known to the Cathedral staff as “Marge.” She had survived the neglect of the pandemic, when everyone was working from home. She survived less than adequate waterings. And she even survived a few disastrous haircuts.

However, Marge was unable to survive more than three months in my care. Sheila, our bookkeeper, walked in one day, a few months into my time in the office and said, “What did you do to Marge?!” She was astounded. I said, “I warned you not to leave her in my care.”

So you see, I can kill a plant that can survive on its own, through neglect, lack of water, and lack of basic needs. It truly is a skill.

So when I get to these passages in the Bible where we start talking about plants and gardens and other things having to do with the outdoors and nature, I get a little nervous. I get a little skeptical. I struggle to relate, because when I see a green thing, I shudder a little on the inside.

But just because I cannot always understand gardening and growing things, doesn’t mean I can’t understand what Jesus was trying to teach his followers and disciples in today’s gospel lesson. Because if there is one thing I do know, it’s that gardening takes a lot of effort. A lot of time. A lot of patience. A willingness to get dirty. And most of all love. And spoiler alert, the gardener is the one who has to do all of those things, not the plants. Jesus is willing to give effort, time, and patience. Jesus is willing to get dirty on our behalf. And Jesus is overflowing with love for each and everyone of us.

In our Gospel text this morning, we see Jesus retreat from the crowd, not to get away from them, but to find a spot where he can more easily be heard. Any of you who have spent any time on or around water, know that the best way to get your voice to naturally amplify is to

speak on a lake or body of water. I learned this the hard way growing up and gossiping with my cousins while floating in inner tubes. Needless to say, our mothers also heard all the gossip, too.

So Jesus retreats into the center of a lake to share this profound parable with his followers. He explains that a sower (that's Jesus) goes out and throws seeds into different patches of ground: a path, a rocky patch, among thorns, and finally in good soil. And Jesus goes on to explain the different outcomes of what happens when the sower throws seeds on each of these places.

I don't know much about gardening (see above) but I do know that the soil **MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE**. And Jesus makes this point perfectly in his parable. Where the seed falls defines what happens to that seed.

So my question to you is, what type of soil has your life become? Has it blossomed into a well tended patch of good soil, or is it somewhere in the midst of thorns and rocks? I think, depending on the season, the soil of your life may change. Think about farmers who change out crops, or give their fields a break for a season to refresh the soil. Just because a soil isn't prime planting today, doesn't mean it won't be prime planting tomorrow.

The same can be said for your faith life, too. Just because you struggle today with allowing the seeds of the Gospel to take root in your heart, doesn't mean you won't be able to bear witness to those seeds tomorrow. Because that is what is so beautiful about Jesus' message is that it is timeless, and the same today, tomorrow, and forever. God doesn't change and God doesn't waver, even when your soil needs a little bit of work.

And here is maybe the best part of this parable, Jesus as the sower will help make the soil of your life hospitable to the seeds he sows. This happens through the Holy Spirit. I don't have to do all the work to make my life into good soil. I just have to be open to the process.

There is a beautiful scene in *The Shack* written by William P. Young and published in 2007, later made into a movie. Mack, the main character, is dealing with insurmountable grief at the loss of his daughter, and spends time at a shack with personifications of the Trinity: Papa, Jesus, and Sarayu (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

In this particular scene we see Sarayu, the Holy Spirit, start ripping out plants and weeds to prepare for a beautiful garden to grow in its place. Mack and Sarayu have some conversation about the pulling of the plants and the pain that goes with removing things to make way for the good things God has in store for our lives. It is painful to have pieces of ourselves removed, yet the Holy Spirit is tasked with helping transform our hearts into the good soil that the sower (Jesus) needs for his good news to take root. Is it painful, you bet! Is it worth it, always. Because God will never leave us worse for wear.

Although *The Shack* is almost 20 years old, I would recommend reading it (or watching it) if you haven't already. There are some good concepts to pull from that story.

So as I was thinking about our Gospel today, I couldn't help but remember that God will always prepare the soil of our hearts to receive the Good News of the Gospel. So although our soil may be rocky or thorny right now, it thankfully won't stay that way.

But here is the even better news. Even if the soil of your heart is rocky or thorny, or not in the best shape, plants can still grow. God's message of love and grace for you, can still take root and hold on until the soil can deepen and change. After all, how often do we see flowers grow in some of the weirdest places: the side of a cliff, a busy sidewalk in New York City, the side of a well traveled gravel road...

This world reminds us, sometimes frequently, that even in the most desolate and rocky places, beauty can emerge. And the same is true with our lives. Even when we are in the middle of the thorn patches, in the middle of the chaos, in the middle of the rocks, beauty and love and grace can emerge in our lives, too.

Because underneath it all, we have a God who will never leave us alone, even if the soil of our hearts is less than ideal for planting. Jesus, the good and faithful sower, will continue to till and tend and garden our hearts to help whatever beauty can be produced to emerge.

The good news on this Sunday in July? Unlike gardening in today's world, where the soil needs to be ideal to make things grow, Jesus is a gardener who can make things grow out of less than perfect conditions. Like the flower growing between the sidewalk slabs, Jesus can make things grow in your life, even if your heart isn't the perfect gardening soil you would like. And The Holy Spirit will work within your life to perfect the soil, but in the meantime, it won't stop Jesus from planting seeds in your life.

Your job? To receive Jesus' seeds of grace, mercy, love, and ultimately forgiveness. Allow them to blossom and grow in your life, so that you may share them with others that you meet.

Jesus' seeds are for you. Each and every one of you. May your hearts be good soil for the seeds to grow, but trust that even if it isn't, beauty will still emerge. And the love and grace of Jesus Christ will still find a way to grow in your life, because we have a gardener who won't stop tilling the soil, and who will never give up on your heart. Siblings in Christ, this is very good news. Amen.