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Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

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Broadcast News

Did you know that the word “broadcast” came from farming? It means sowing seeds in a field by casting them broadly around. That sums up our parable for today. Basically: *A farmer went out to plant some seeds, and all manner of results occurred.*

But of course, the word “broadcast” has evolved to refer to the widespread distribution of information. Now, when we think of broadcasting, we may focus on the problems of broadcasting-- like the proliferation of misinformation on social media and TV, and the constant barrage of repeated negative news. For example, all of the extreme weather, the flooding, heat, are now proclaimed as our climate change “new-normal.” It’s important to be informed. But how do we keep hope for change alive when assailed by broadcast seeds of doom?

Broadcasting bad news is one thing. But, our parable today hints at something life-giving. The metaphor from our parable is the sowing of seeds, the many failures of growth, and then the miraculous abundance of grain. Today, as we contemplate the broadcasting of seeds, I invite us to think about our role in broadly spreading the seeds of love in a world hungry for good news. What seeds are being spread?

Some people are excellent examples of those who expect the best in others, and patiently sow seeds of love. It often means a long wait, failure to see any sign of budding. . . But sometimes, there is a surprising abundance. I’m thinking of a friend, whose daughter got into substance abuse as a middle-schooler. The daughter gave birth to a son, when she was age 15. When I first knew this mother/grandmother, the daughter was in her mid-twenties with a 10-year-old son, and still in the throes of addiction. My friend tried all she knew to help. She attended AA, saw counselors, set boundaries, kept praying and just kept on loving her daughter and grandson. Every time a rehab center seemed promising, the thorny weeds choked out progress in recovery. My friend finally ended up moving into a retirement center, partly because there was no expectation then that her daughter would expect to move in again. . . This was a very difficult decision. Basically, all she could do was to love her daughter, and pray.

I spoke to my friend this week. She is happy in her new community. And she told me that for the first time in 20 years, her daughter seems to be in recovery that is lasting. She’s become a member in a church that meets her spiritual needs, and helps keep her on track. It seems that the seeds of healing and love are taking root, finally. My friend is experiencing this as an almost-miracle, given how fraught the past twenty years. To my friend, this new hope is a miracle. What seeds were spread?

We all have someone, or some situation, that at times may seem hopeless: a family member, a difficult job situation, a struggling friendship, a broken relationship, a wayward child or grandchild. We can look to this parable as encouragement to trust God to ultimately bring new life. We’re not talking about narrow optimism, but Gospel (good news). We’re talking about the powerful reality of God that overcomes suffering, evil, and even death. How DO we discover that love, and keep it in the forefront of our lives? And, importantly, how do we share the abundance with others? We will go more depth into this, but first, I want to give a little

introduction on parables, since over the next few Sundays, our appointed readings will include many of Jesus' parables.

What is a parable? Well, at its simplest, a parable is a metaphor drawn from nature or everyday life, grabbing us by its vividness or strangeness, and often leaving some surprise for us to ponder. Parables should work on us in heart-opening surprise. Poet W. H. Auden put it like this:

“Blessed be all metrical rules that forbid automatic responses, and force us to have second thoughts, free from the fetters of Self.”

How we read parables has changed over time. The parable is a story told to help us see things as they are. And to show us how things could be. Parables have multiple interpretations. No one way is correct. Parables are not allegory, so there is no set rule about who is whom in the story.

Now, in verses 18-33, of Matthew 13, there is an allegorical interpretation of the parable that Jesus told. But, the written Gospels were compiled over time, so that it's most likely that the allegory came much later than the original part from Matt. 13:1-8. Right now, we are going to focus on the nugget of the parable story itself, and we will if something may surprise us into an insight that makes us have second thoughts, and opens our hearts.

One way to approach a parable afresh is to consider the different characters in the story, and to ask yourself, where do we fit into the story? Most often this parable of the sower has been read with Jesus as the Sower. . .But, what if we reassign the roles? What if the sower is the follower of Jesus? What if YOU are the sower? What if I am the sower? What if the sower is St. Andrew Lutheran? What seeds are we spreading?

The farmer goes out to plant seeds. She flings the seeds broadly, hoping for a good outcome. Some of the seed fall on rocky ground with not enough soil to grow. Some seeds get eaten by birds. Some grow among weeds and get choked out. Some seeds fall on good soil and bring forth grain: thirty, sixty, and one-hundred-fold!

“Yes,” says Jesus, to those who would follow: “That's the way it is: When you follow my way, you broadcast seeds of compassion and love. Often times that love falls on rocky ground, or gets choked by weeds, and doesn't take hold. The environment we live in is harsh. But, sometime that love lands in someone's heart in the right place at the right time, and then blooms and grows, extravagantly!”

Who knows what great extravagance God will blossom out of St. Andrew Lutheran, from the seeds we plant? We scatter seeds of life and light when we offer kindness, or a non-judgmental, listening ear. Or by going out of our way to help someone else. Or by sharing what we have with others. There are opportunities every single day to sow seeds of love in others. But, the parable tells us that we must sow, knowing that we may not see results. Love, trust, and see what happens.

For many years, I led a monthly , Saturday afternoon, worship service, with a prayer team. We sang chants from the Taizé community , in France. In the candlelit sanctuary, in the hush between songs, a few people would come to the kneelers, as we laid hands on them and prayed for wholeness and healing. In order to promote attendance at this service, I took flyers to hospital waiting rooms, and posted events by email and Facebook. I had dreamed of that service filled with spiritual seekers, maybe even young people who didn't care for Sunday services with sermons and hymns. . . Over a score of years, this service never gained traction with very many people. Thirty people showing up would be a crowd. Who knows? Maybe Saturday evening at 5pm was probably a rocky-ground sort of time.

But there was a woman who came to the service because of she was estranged from her son. She shared her burden with the prayer team and felt our hands on her shoulders as we prayed for peace, and for healing of the relationship. She showed up again the following month. For over three years, she rarely missed a service. Then, one evening, she arrived, accompanied by her son, and his family. We prayed for them all of them together that evening. The light in her eyes, and the joy visible in her, with her family together, was unforgettable.

The healing service never drew multitudes of people. But for that family, there was a multifold crop of love and peace. This is what God will do when we plant seeds of love. But we must not lose heart when things don't emerge or grow as we expected. We must lovingly release our hopes and dreams and let God bring the growth.

Sowing seeds of good will, and love-- this really is the daily work to which we are all called, wherever we are—at home, at church, at school, in our communities.

Each of us has seeds to sow. Every act of kindness you extend to the grocery checker, every encouragement of a child, every caring call made, every dish washed, each weed pulled; every English lesson taught, every meal prepared and served with love—each one of those things, and more—is sowing the seeds of love. Friends, we are doing it.

The sanctuary committee of St. Andrew has been helping two refugee families from Afghanistan. There have been shared meals, some monetary support, advice shared on how to manage financially in a different culture; lessons in English, and child care offered, while the mothers connected with one another. Every gathering of our sanctuary team with the families is a new opportunity, even an experiment, in finding the best ways to nurture and support independence in their new culture in the U.S. Think of the seeds of new life!

My mom and dad moved into the house next door a couple of years ago. We share a pebbled courtyard area. My mother has been diligent about planting flowers in pots, some herbs and other plants. Sadly, we realized that she overwatered many of the pots, which didn't get enough sun in the early spring. In the cloudy cold of last May, those plants slowly rotted. But there was one grapevine, planted on the west side of their house, in full sun. They planted just the one plant, up against a wire fence. Amazingly, even as the other plants died, the grapevine grew like gangbusters. (Remember that musical, *Little Shop of Horrors*? Seymour: "Feed me!") The grapevine is well over seven times its original size and shooting out healthy green tendrils. I can already almost taste the tang of the grapes that will eventually grow and ripen.

That's the image I want to leave with us. A grapevine, growing wildly and quickly—life that won't be stopped. Think about the people in our neighborhood and city who have not formed spiritual practices, or who need spiritual friendships.

As we invite others to join in the nature and community of St. Andrew, our invitation will often fall on unready soil. But, think about that grapevine flourishing in the heart of the soul who thirsts for God.

Maybe YOU are the sower who will help to bring it about.