

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason Glombicki
July 16, 2017

I'm excited! Have you noticed our new green paraments are finally here! This is the liturgical season when we are surrounded by green and we focus on growth, learning, and discovery. It's fitting that we have these new paraments on a day when we're talking about the growth of seeds in different soil types. To engage this gospel story, I've given you a handout so we can explore what's going and how it might relate to our lives. Before we begin, we need to remember the context in which Jesus tells this parable.

In the arc of Matthew's gospel, we are about halfway through. So far, Jesus announced God's reign that will turn everything upside down and transform others to love. Jesus brought this transformation into people's lives through healing and liberation. From there, he sent out the twelve disciples to transform others' lives. In today's story, the disciples were back and had found that people aren't always receptive to transformational work. Not everyone wants to confront evil and recognize the value of all. Even when they do, people don't often want to change how they live to align with those values. With that in mind, Jesus tells a parable.

	A	B	C	D	E
	Where did the seeds fall?	What happened to the seeds?	Describe the characteristics of that soil.	What does that soil look like individually?	What does that soil look like communally?
1	Path (Matthew 13:4)	Birds came and ate them.	Hard - seeds could not get into the soil to grow.	Misunderstanding (v.19) and not open to being transformed.	When we're not able to listen to other's experiences. For example, we devalue experiences of the marginalized saying that people of color's experience with the police is inaccurate. We de-legitimize women by paying them lower wages for the same work. When we don't work to understand the stories of immigrants, refugees, elderly, those suffering the impact of climate change, and other marginalized groups.

2	Rocky ground (Matthew 13:5)	Plant sprang up quickly, but died in the sun.	Softer soil (the seeds entered and grew), but no depth to sustain the seed. (v.5)	We get excited or passionate about something for good reason, but ultimately, the passion doesn't continue and fades.	As a congregation, we are committed to welcoming LGBTQ people, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, but is that a passive statement or true commitment to growth and transformation of those seeds? Or, in this country, we shoot off fireworks calling it "the land of the free," but do we work for real freedom worldwide?
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3	Among the thorns (Matthew 13:7)	Thorns choked out the plant.	Softer soil with depth (thorns were able to grow and survive), but there was no space for the seeds to grow.	We become open to possibility, we find excitement about something, and we've got the ability to sustain it, but we spend our time and resources on less important things.	In our congregation, we say that love and transformation are values, we're excited about them, and we can sustain them, but when the giving campaign comes do we financially support the ministry? Instead, do we spend it on trips, concerts, or unnecessary home improvements? Or, what about using our free time. Instead of giving thanks for what we've received by volunteering or writing our elected officials, do we spend most of our free time hiking, beaching, or couch-surfing? Is it about what we can get, instead of how can we serve in gratitude?
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4	<p>Good soil (Matthew 13:8)</p>	<p>Grew in <u>abundance</u> and produced more seeds!</p>	<p>Based on the yield, the soil was soft so the seeds could be buried, it was deep to provide nourishment, and it had space to thrive and grow.</p>	<p>Moments when we are open to transformation, where we deeply commit, and where we get our priorities in line with what is important. In those moments, we not only live in God's abundance but we also inspire others to do the same.</p>	<p>In 2006 this congregation became a "reconciling in Christ" place that welcomes all people no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity. This statement required openness for transformation. There was an opportunity to provide nourishment and space for that principle by calling me as an openly gay pastor. That good soil has begun to produce its own seeds when we became an "immigrant welcoming congregation," and when we share this space with community groups for over 1,500 hours this year so far. These welcoming seeds continue to be spread.</p>
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So, hopefully that helps breakdown what we're working with. Do you see how that relates to our world? Well, I've got two final questions for us to ponder. I wonder...

1. Why doesn't the sower only focus on spreading seeds on the "good soil?"

It doesn't seem a good use of precious seeds to spread it on all four types of soil, so why bother? Why should *we* bother with people or organizations that are like the hardened path, the rocky ground, or the thorny soil? Is there value in engaging and sharing love and time in these locations?

Let's think about the hard soil and the image of the bird who eats the seed. It might look like the end for the seed. Birds, however, are key for taking seeds to new places and adding some fresh fertilize when it poops the seed out. Although the seeds on the path might not produce here and now, it might be the beginnings of something we do not see. Or, how about seeds that died quickly, perhaps they produced awe for a short-time and inspired the sower? Or the thorny soil seeds, are they a cautionary tale so we might realize when our lives don't feel alive? Maybe there is unseen value in spreading the good news of love, justice, and peace even on inhospitable soil.¹

¹ This response is influenced by Michelle Voss Roberts in *Feasting on the Gospels. Matthew, Vol 1, Chapters 1-13.* " Matthew 13:1-9, p. 350-354.

2. What can you take from this story and apply to your life, the world, and/or your understanding of God?

I've discovered that we often embody the characteristics of each soil type. Sometimes we're hardened to God's love or something new because of misunderstanding. Sometimes we're excited, but we let it fade. Other times, we miss the important priorities and need to adjust. At times, we are like the good soil producing and inspiring further growth. The wonderful thing about our God is that she is the great sower. In our lives, God sows love, justice, and peace even when we are hardened, flighty, or embrace misaligned priorities. Sure, the good news may not take root at this moment, but God has a way of continuing to sow. Maybe the transformation will be planted in a new time in our life. Perhaps a passion for justice will flare in us again. Maybe God will show us the need for change when our own selfish desires compete with loving others. Then, there are those idyllic moments, where everything seems to fit together. There, the seeds that were sown bloom. There, we understand God's spirit a little more. There, we see the love of God's creation. There, we stand in awe of God among us. So, may we, like God, go into the world and sow transformation in every place knowing that our work is not in vain. Amen.