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AMDG

Proper 10A – July 16, 2017

As a young man when I would hear this parable, my mind would automatically go to Jesus' explanation and especially to the kinds of soil on which the seed was scattered. When I was feeling humble, I'd pray that God would help me be the good soil and that God's Word could yield the fruit of grace in my heart one-hundred fold. I worried that my soil was the path or the rocky ground or the thorny soil...And, in more self-satisfied or self-righteous moments I thought about those around me who I judged to be the trodden path or rocky soil or thorny ground, and how those poor souls would never feel God's grace. I rarely if ever thought about the sower.

But, more and more now when I read this parable and others like it, my mind goes to the crazy sower. What farmer in his right mind throws seed wherever, without a care for where it falls? What kind of farmer doesn't prepare the soil ahead of sowing - plowing, harrowing, perhaps even treating the soil? The farmer Jesus described did none of these things. He just grabbed a bag of seed and flung it around without regard for what might happen to it. You get the idea that this farmer would scatter his precious seed over a Wal-Mart parking lot.

Most of us 21st century listeners are far removed from the process of large scale farming, and probably don't know the many technologically advanced methods of sowing seeds that have been developed over the years - everything from seed injectors to hydroponics. But, most of us have planted our own little gardens, and probably have taken at least some care to prepare the soil and at least minimal attention to how we place the seeds. However, that's not the agronomist of our parable. Just imagine how the listeners of first century Palestine would have heard this. They were subsistence farmers, for whom seed was a precious commodity, and the success of a growing season was a matter of survival. It wasn't just foolhardy to throw seed so carelessly; it was suicidal.

So, this is really the shocking part of the parable, isn't it? If we equate God with the sower, and God's loving-kindness or grace or mercy as the seed, then what this says to us is that God's attention is not on whether the seed might be wasted. It's on the sowing. It's not on the receiving; it's on the giving. God is not worried about whether there will be enough seed or grace or love. God does not hold back. God may want our hearts to be good soil, but nevertheless hurls a ridiculous amount of seed on whatever soil. And, why would he do this? Why this extravagance? Because there's enough! A great abundance of love and mercy. And we are enough. We are worth the extravagance. This wonderful parable is another example of the extravagant love of God. We are God's beloved. And our hearts - whether beaten down paths, rocky soil, thorny ground, or good soil - God considers worthy of being showered with grace. God knows that our hearts are often unprepared, but also occasionally fertile. Of course they are, because they are reflections of his own fertile heart. So, he flings the seed confidently.

And, from what this parable tells us, God's crazy sowing plan pays out. Any normal farmer would be happy to reap a twofold harvest. A fivefold harvest would be a cause for great celebration. But, God's crazy sowing plan reaps thirty, sixty, even a hundredfold. God showers an insane amount of love and mercy on his beloved because we are worth it, and because God knows that loving us just as we are - rocky, thorny, beaten down, or fertile - will eventually pay out. This parable, of course is not about farming methods. Don't expect to throw seeds willy-nilly all over your yard and expect great bounty. However it is very much about how God loves us - just as we are.

Loving us as we are, of course, is not the same as being content with where we are. God loves us and wants us to experience the abundance of his graces so we can grow in our love and trust of God and grow in love and service to our neighbor. As we experience God's abundance, poured out in Christ, God expects we will cease being driven by fear and scarcity. And in receiving the abundance of God's love and mercy, we will want to shower it upon others. God wants us to be the crazy sowers, because This parable is also about discipleship. God is betting that, on the occasion when seed happens to land on our heart when it's fertile, we will turn against the evil that overshadows us. We will stop parsing

out love and forgiveness; stop doling out food and shelter and healing. And, we will be the crazy sowers of God's love and mercy in our hungry world. Precisely because God loves us with abandon, does God want us to stand against the fear and scarcity that drive prejudice, racism, greed, and violence. Precisely because God loves us extravagantly, does God expect us to strive for the equality and dignity of all people. Precisely because God loves us abundantly, does God wait for us to share what we have generously so all will have enough. Precisely because God loves us deeply does God long for us to grow into the people God knows we can be.

But, all of God's hopes for us spring from the one basic overarching truth - God's unconditional, extravagant love for and acceptance of us right here, right now, just as we are. There is enough. You are enough. God will never give up on us. God's love is unending. Let anyone with ears listen!