

One Seed – Varied Soil
Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23

All Saints Lutheran Church

Listen, a sower went out to sow. And in so doing, some seed fell upon the path. Birds came and immediately ate the seed.

More seed was lost to the rocky ground. This seed at least had time to germinate. There were roots and shoots. But with no depth of soil, the roots had no place to go. The roots could not sustain the plant under the hot sun. Another crop lost. More seed wasted. Maybe. Maybe not.

And when even more seed fell among the thorns, so plant and weed grew together, competing with one another for nutrients and sun and water, it was no time at all before the plants born of seed withered, choked out.

Either this sower was extremely careless or wasteful or sloppy....or so I used to think. The sower was a clutz. Something was really wrong here.

But then It sunk in that even in good soil, the sower had no consistent yield. The seed was the same. And it's not like the soil did anything to boost the crop! The soil was soil, passive, merely the bed for germination and growth. The soil didn't do anything.... But then why was I led to believe that you and I were to be like good soil...? Yielding thirtyfold or sixty or a hundred times what was sown!

I was told that you and I have different gifts, different opportunities, different capabilities. But the life was in the seed... not the soil! Soil is just soil. Wet, brown, smelling like... well, soil.

Isn't that what you were led to believe? The point of the story is that we are to be good soil, receiving the gospel – the life force of the seed – and bringing forth all that we can....?

But do you know what? That's not the point at all!

The story is not about us at all!

Let's go back to the beginning.... "Listen," Jesus said, "A sower went out to sow...."

Jesus is telling a story--- using elements of nature to deliver the point. He must have been quite the observer, paying attention to the details unfolding around him... and then trying to get the disciples and others to understand. It was like he was himself, working the soil and planting a seed...

A parable is a story... and in almost every case, the real point of the story is a surprise, something seen but unexpected.

So the disciples went to Jesus afterward and Jesus had to explain "This is the parable of the sower..."

Wait a minute. He said "sower"! Not soil! The point is in the sower! It's about the sower not ourselves!

So, the sower was a clutz after all? Careless? Reckless, Wasteful?

It seemed the sower was not interested in maximizing profits. I mean, he was planting a crop, after all. The sower did not hoard the seed and mill it and eat it. That would make something of last year's crop. Not this one. The sower put the seed in the ground! In good soil. And the seed took root and grew and flowered and ripened and died and was cut down and was harvested. And thirty or sixty or a hundred times the return is a good thing!

But not the only thing.

You see the power of the seed was in the seed, not the soil. The sower sowed good seed! The sower had a thing about **life**! And life was in the **seed**! The sower went out to scatter **life**! So the sower wanted that seed to go **everywhere**!

On the path. Maybe some seed would get worked into the soil because of the traffic. Maybe along the edges. Maybe in the shade. Maybe... something would grow!

But not so. The birds came and ate the seed up. Like seagulls following the tiller and making a fuss over the seeder. At last the life would be in the birds!

Some seed was scattered to the rock. Life was thrown everywhere – even to the rocks. And it worked! The seed germinated and took root. Life bearing life! For a time... for the briefest of time, the sower saw green shoots. There was life. The sun and the rain kissed the seed and awakened it...

The sower was mad about life. He would scatter life. Life was sacred, even for a brief time.

But then it withered. It died.

But the sower was not done! The life was scattered in the field. It was kissed and warmed and cuddled and it was responding as life should.

Maybe there could be more. The sower was crazy about life. Maybe over there...Maybe in that weedy patch.

And it worked! There were green shoots. Life bearing life! But there was a bias to this plot This plot was prejudiced. The seed was good life. But the weed had its life and the weed would compete with seed. And the weed would strain every bit of sacred life out of that seed and insist that the weed would prosper and spread and thrive.

The seed would die. The sower was crazy about life. But life can be crazy on its own.

The disciples still didn't get it. Did they?

Look, this is the story about the sower. The sower is crazy about life. Life is sacred. Life should be everywhere. So the sower sows life everywhere! But there is evil. There is death. And the death of a seed in harvest is a good death, necessary death, purposeful death. But there is wanton, cruel, wasteful death. There is a quality to life that is not kind. There is a quality to life that does not honor the sacred life. Sometimes this evil snatches life before it even gets a chance.

Disease, tragedy, storm, accident.... You know it when you see it. There are no green shoots only tears and anguish. You know in this kind of death that this is not kind death. This is not the sower's plan. Don't ever say, "This is the sower's plan!" That is cruel and dishonest. It is not the truth about the sower has a crazy passion for life!

But the sower will not give up. The sower will not be content with thirty, sixty or even a hundredfold return. The sower will scatter **life** wherever it might take hold.

And it will! And it does! It's like shoots among the rocks. The promise of green. The appearance of a head, a flower, another seed, many more seeds! And there is great joy. Great joy! The joy of birth! And adventures. And accomplishments. And young love. And possibilities.....

But life happens...Jesus calls it "trouble" and he calls it persecutions. Persecution is trouble that limits possibility, often with violence and cruelty. And life falls. This life is hard. Hard as rocks. This life falls between the cracks. And all that remains is stone silence.

But the sower does not stop, even then.

The sower is crazy about **life**. And will scatter life anywhere.

But life brings with it struggle and competition; life is not always fair.

Opportunities are not always equitable. And the "cares of the world," Jesus called them, become too much. And one care – Jesus named specifically **wealth** – wealth has its own lure, its own distraction.

Wealth provides good things: schools and hospitals and poets and musicians and football teams. Sometimes the football teams are pretty good; sometimes, not so bad. This is that thirty-sixty-eighty stuff... And when the “not so good” becomes “pretty bad” and the pretty bad becomes a care and concern, something withers and the sweetness of the life in the seed turns bitter. And bitterness can become poison. And wealth turns from providence to corruption. And something dies. Everybody wants wealth, but not at any price.

Weeds choke. Weeds spread. Weeds make lousy bread. Not like seed.

The sower went out to seed. The sower would scatter life anywhere. Everywhere.

You can name the sower what you like. But there's no denying the life in the sower's seed.

Even short-lived life can be beautiful. And meaningful. And purposeful.

To sort of edit a familiar saying: Better to have loved life and lost than never to have loved life... or lived love... at all.

Listen, a sower went out to sow... He was crazy about the life in the seed. And he would see that that life was scattered everywhere!