

**Sowing Seeds of Faith**  
**Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**  
**July 16, 2023 – Parkminster United Church**

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It's amazing to think about how technology – even within the past couple of decades – has changed so much. Before the age of social media influencers and TikTok, blogging was the vehicle to share one's life, hobbies, and interests with the online world. For those of you who may not be familiar with blogs, they are basically online journals, and a blogger is the person who writes there – be it a personal journal for themselves or their family – or a public blogger - writing about an interest that others can share. You may remember the 2009 film *Julie and Julia* that shared the story of blogger Julie Powell who kept an online blog as she attempted to cook her way through Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*.

Today I'm going to tell you about another widely popular blogger from around that time named Ree Drummond whose blog, *The Pioneer Woman*, led to a career on the Food Network, her own Mercantile, merchandise line and more. She lives on a working cattle ranch in Oklahoma, is married to a fourth-generation cattle rancher where they raised their now young adult children. She wrote about everything from life on the ranch, to baking and cooking, photography, to keeping up with household chores, both inside and out.

But Drummond did not always live life on the prairie. She grew up in the suburbs of Oklahoma City, attended college in Los Angeles and fully expected to attend law school in Chicago. She was a city girl through and through until she had a clandestine meeting with a cowboy one night in a country bar. The rest, you could say, is history. And one of the reasons thousands and thousands of people eagerly followed her blog was because she was honest to a fault about her life on the ranch – and chronicled both the joys and the disappointments of living and working in the agricultural world.

She has said, "You know, when you live in the agricultural world you really learn to be thankful for everything that you have. Hard work is always a necessity on the ranch – but it doesn't mean that things always turn out as planned."

When I read our Scripture story this week, I couldn't get Drummond's thoughts out of my head. "One day, a farmer went out sowing seed," the Gospel says. "Some of the seed landed on a footpath, where birds came and ate it up. Some of the seeds fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. This seed sprouted at once since the soil had no depth, but when the sun rose and scorched it, it withered away for lack of roots. Again, some of the seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. And some of it landed on good soil, and yielded a crop thirty, sixty, even a hundred times what was sown."

As I reflected on this reading while pondering this sermon on Tuesday, I was finding it ironic that I was looking at the parable of the sower while the rain that was falling outside of my window was also watering our gardens and plants at home. It was even more ironic because

the day before I had been wondering about whether the soil had reached a point of dryness where I needed to tend to our drooping vegetable plants. Perhaps those heavy rains on Tuesday were the Spirit's way of reminding me and urging me to let go of my need to control outcomes and to be patient for the rains to come.

That would have been a great sermon, right? "Be patient and God will grow the seeds that you plant."

But of course, it was not that simple. The next morning when the rains had cleared, I went outside to check on the gardens. And I noticed that while the rain did nurture some of our plants, causing them to seemingly sprout up overnight, it also essentially drowned out some of the other plants, causing them to collapse in a heaping pile on the ground. So, then I started thinking: There might be more to this parable than simply, "trust and God will provide."

So, here's a question: Was Jesus really talking about sowing seeds?

Jesus used this parable to talk about life. He was talking about journeys of faith. He was talking about growing communities of faithful individuals who are all different from one another and finding ways to make that community thrive.

Over the years, those roots have been tested. There have been times of growth and there have been times where the community struggled to hold it together. Some of the seeds that were planted eventually did not make it. In our own piece of spiritual history here at Parkminster those roots have been tested. There have been times of flourishing growth and there have been times where the community struggled - sometimes through challenges beyond control. Some of the seeds that were planted did not make it. But many did.

Planting seeds and fostering growth can be one of the most frustrating and exhilarating parts of ministry together. Because communities of faith can do everything right – you can have an engaging outreach and community partnerships, great worship and music week after week, deeply committed and caring individuals, enriching ministries with children, youth, and families, and fabulous programming that brings in the community – and sometimes you do not see results. The same thing happens in the garden, right? You can do everything right – you can plant when you are supposed to plant, water when you are supposed to water, put up a fence so that those pesky little bunnies stay out – and yet sometimes you have a bad season, and you end up with a disappointing crop.

So, what is the point? If we can do everything right and we still cannot guarantee that we will grow our community; if we can do everything right and we still cannot guarantee that we will spread strong roots that will sustain us always, then why do we even try to sow those seeds in the first place?

Ultimately, that is what God calls us to do. Jesus modeled a life of service and of healing and of commitment to growth and he urged his followers to do the same. However, Jesus did not say that it was going to be easy. And yet he told a crowd this parable. He told the crowd that had gathered that when you sow seeds, they will not necessarily take root.

When we sow seeds – any seeds – we cannot always control where they will fall. One summer Drummond posted a photo on her blog of a raised vegetable garden. Weeks prior she had planted lettuce and had spread it evenly throughout the garden only to have harsh rains and winds come through and move the seeds around. When the plants started to grow, half of the garden was completely empty, and half of the garden had clusters of squished-together lettuce.

We cannot always control where the seeds will fall. We cannot control the rain that will fall, the sun that will shine or even the pesky little rabbits that will find their way through the fence and nibble away at our lettuce. We do the best that we can, we plant where and when we should, we water when the soil seems dry, and we weed when we think the roots need room to grow.

We prepare ourselves and the garden itself for any scenario or bump in the road that we and it might face. We nurture seeds that land on rocky terrain because we think there is a possibility that they could still flourish. We put in a lot of hard work and energy. But in the end, we still cannot control the outcome.

It is the same in churches. It is the same in this community of faith. We want to keep growing and sharing what makes this place so special to us with others. We want all people to experience the radical welcome, hospitality, and inclusivity of this place. And there is only one way to do that. We need to sow seeds of faith. We need to nurture those seeds wherever they happen to fall. We cannot be discouraged by where they fall or how well they might be growing at first. A slow first crop – or even subsequent bad ones to follow – cannot discourage us. We need to prepare ourselves for difficult seasons and trust that God will provide to us in our darkest hours. We cannot expect absolute perfection, rather we need to continue to do the best that we can. And we need to know that our seeds will grow.

We could read the parable of the sower and take away the lesson that if we put our faith in God that God will provide. We could also read the parable of the sower and take away the lesson that you need to plant seeds in good soil for them to grow.

But if we really dig deep, we also realize that this parable is about even more than those two things. This parable is about the community that sustains each other when nothing seems to be growing. This parable is about standing beside one another and holding each other up when our roots have not yet taken. This parable is about looking at where the seeds – all the seeds are - and finding ways to nurture them wherever they have fallen. Seeds will fall on rocky grounds, rain will drown weakened roots and droughts will dry out soil, but the real test of faith is what we do after that happens. This parable is about finding grace in unexpected places. This parable is about seeking God's shelter and protection when the seeds do not seem to be

growing and this parable is a reminder to give thanks to God not only when are experiencing a time of growth and abundance, but always.

In other words, the farmer in Jesus's parable is wholly unconcerned about where the seed falls or lands or settles — all the farmer chooses to do is keep sowing. Keep flinging. Keep opening his hands. Why? Because there's enough seed to go around. There's enough seed to accomplish the farmer's purposes. There is enough.

Sometimes we forget that all the terrain — *all the terrain* — is under God's provision and sustained by God's love. Who are we to tell the Creator what "good soil" looks like? How can we sow the seeds that we have been so freely and lavishly given? What if every seed we plant is a blessing no matter the outcome?

This parable encourages the church across the ages to be known for its absurd generosity. In a broken, hurting world, how can we be like that farmer, going out in joy, scattering seed before and behind us in the widest arcs our arms can make. How I wish the world could laugh at our lavishness and be recipients of it. How I wish everyone could see the quiet, gentle confidence in us when we tend to the hard, rocky, thorny places in our lives and communities. How I wish seeds of love, mercy, justice, humility, and vulnerability would fall through our fingers in such appalling quantities that even the birds, the rocks, the thorns, and the shallow, sun-scorched corners of the world would burst into colorful, riotous, *joyous* life.

The thing about this parable is that at some deep, intuitive level, we see its wisdom. Whether we want to admit it or not, we know that Jesus is telling us the truth. We understand that seeds are mysterious. We know that the most elegant and carefully cultivated gardens can fail, while a profusion of weedy, vibrant flowers pushes through a crack in the pavement and brightens a neighborhood. We've seen how new life can spring from the deadest, most shriveled places in our lives — places we've given up on, places we assumed were hardened beyond hope. We've witnessed inhospitable environments being altered by love. We know that joy flows from selflessness and generosity, not from caution and elitism.

In this broken, hurting world, perhaps we need to be intentional to not only reclaim but share our joy. Joy that is not superficial — but a joy that emboldens us stay committed in our work towards justice and compassion. Joy that extends to one another but also bursts forth from this place into our communities and the world. A joy that ultimately leads us to follow in the footsteps of this extravagant Sower. Joy that is carefree in its generosity. Joy that isn't fearful or waits for a terrain more deserving.

Today, I invite you to reclaim that joy. Imagine the farmer tossing seeds into the wind with a daring and delighted smile. Share in this joy — toss your own handfuls across the earth. Be absurd with your generosity. Who knows what may grow.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Rev. Heather Power

*With gratitude to Ree Drummond, Debie Thomas, and others.*