

## **WELCOME 5 August 2018 – 11 Pentecost '18 B**

Matthew 13:1-23

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here this morning. Please stay with us for morning tea after worship so we can get a chance to know one another better...

Contrast: the state of being strikingly different from something else in close association – to be strikingly different. So says the dictionary...

Jesus was a master at contrast. He told common stories about everyday subjects & mundane experiences to share the deep truth about God that radically contrasted with people's expectations & understanding.

7 stories (Bible calls parables) over 6 weeks that will transform your relationship with God & your understanding of His way in this world.

This week...the Parable of the Sower... "Once upon a time, a farmer went out & sowed some seeds..." But unlike our graphic...The seed goes everywhere...it's extravagant & seems reckless & relentless **AND** it bears fruit at just the right time & just the right place & produces exactly the abundant harvest God intended right when you'd least expect it.

Here's the deal...Jesus came to this world to produce people in whom the power of His kingdom bears fruit. Not to just take us away to heaven at some distant future point, but to make God's love & life & the reality of his rule of grace so real & present in us by his power that God's kingdom is evident in all we do. **AND** he sows his presence, love & power until the harvest comes & we get heaven in the bargain But today: *"Blessed are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear."*

We'll explore & experience that together...

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

*Father you are the God of excessive love, extravagant mercy, and relentless grace. Let your abundance fill us to overflowing so that our lives bear the fruit of your Spirit that gives testimony to your Kingdom and glory to your name. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## 11 PENTECOST '18 B – CONTRAST – PARABLE OF THE SOWER

### FAITH CHAT:

1. Have you ever grown something exciting...tried and failed?
2. What are some "thorns" & "rocks" that "choke out" your spiritual growth & fruit-bearing?

"Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds..." And every farmer I know would have given this guy the sack right then & there. Seriously...it looks like he turned on the seeder before he got all the way out of the shed. Seed on the driveway. Seed in the kids' sandpit. Seed in his wife's begonias. Finally some seed in the furrows...but it took him long enough.

What's up here? How is this a Jesus story...a kingdom story? Mt has already given us a look at Jesus' preaching Mt 4:13ff *When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he left Judea & returned to Galilee...he moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee... From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins & turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."* Mt 4:23 - *Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues & announcing the Good News about the Kingdom.* Remember...Contrast! Striking difference & parable = lay alongside **BIBLES**

*Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst recounts the sad tale of Alexander having one of those days...gum in his hair, <sup>b/</sup><sub>t</sub> brother/sister in the middle of the backseat, afforded only 3<sup>rd</sup>-best-friend status, no dessert at lunch, lima beans for dinner, railroad pajamas, & kissing on TV—all in 1 day! Maybe he'll just move to Australia.

That describes Jesus' last 24-48 hours...This series of parables actually begins in Mt 12...It starts with Jesus/disciples walking through a grainfield hungry. They pull some heads off the crop rub off the husks & have a walking homemade muesli bar... cereal no milk. Pharisees pop up Ah HA! We caught you breaking the Law/the Sabbath. Jesus pulls out some OT history & finishes by saying the *Son of Man is Lord even over the Sabbath!*...not what religious hot-shots want to hear - that this guy is somehow in charge of their prized ritual touchstone/Sabbath. They don't get it but they don't like it.

He goes from there to the synagogue & they shove a guy with a withered hand in his face. Again the religious bigwigs are all "Can you work/heal on the Sabbath?" Of course Jesus heals the hand & deals his interrogators a heavy slap by comparing this to at least pulling your prize sheep out of a well & by the way "*how much more valuable is a person than a sheep.*" Now they start plotting to kill him. Wait it gets better/worse

Jesus heads out into the street & someone in the mob plonks a demon-possessed guy at his feet...blind – mute – possessed (& you think you've got it tough) So...Jesus heals him AND everyone within Coo-ie just for good measure. At this point the crowd is on fire & some start to wonder if Jesus is the Messiah...But his ol' mates the Pharisees say "No...it must be Satan! That's how he's doing this." Jesus then quotes Abe Lincoln about a "*house divided against itself cannot stand*" or maybe Lincoln quotes Jesus but he then throws down the gauntlet...challenges his enemies to decide..."*But if I am casting out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has arrived among you.*" Satan casting out himself is ridiculous. And you seem powerless against evil. I'm not. So...if you're not on board with me you're working for that other guy...Just rips 'em a new one

After they catch their breath they demand he produce some sign that proves what he just said...withered hand & demon-possessed guy weren't enough? But Jesus refuses & drops this bombshell: "*...the only sign I will give is the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for 3 days & 3 nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for 3 days & 3 nights.*" When you see death defeated maybe you'll pay attention...always bet on the guy who predicts his death & resurrection & then does it.

It doesn't end there...Jesus' mom shows up w/ some of his brothers presumably to intervene before he gets in real trouble...maybe they think he's been in the sun too long & his head's not right...so Jesus completely re-defines family: "*Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother & sister & mother!*"

Matthew then says, "*Later that same day Jesus left the house & sat beside the lake.*" If that were me, I'd be thinking Australia...But the crowd shows up & he gets into a boat & moves just far enough off shore to be able to see & breathe...a couple of big deep breaths & maybe he sees a famer up just beyond the sand dunes working his field & he begins: "*Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field...*" the seeds went everywhere...the road, the rocks, the weedy fencerows & the furrows & those seeds produced abundantly...if you're listening, take this in.

Now the disciples lean over...Hey Jesus...we're not sure anybody understood that. Why do you do parables? (vs 10) His answer is a reflection on everything that has gone b/4. Vss 11-15 - In essence...You just saw folks who didn't want to hear what I was saying. They've rejected me already, so from now on those whose hearts are absolutely hardened against the Kingdom of grace will hear but not understand – see but not really see...But those who are listening & who are longing for more than the religion & rules & rituals & the world's way of keeping score & stepping on the necks of anybody who gets between you & what you think you deserve...will see grace & mercy & love & joy & peace flourish in their lives...what I've promised come to pass

Never forget...In his first extended sermon, Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5-6-7, Jesus gave a picture of the Kingdom present in him...The heart of that sermon is simple "*God blesses you*"- (*bless = to impart power to enrich to make overflow*) poor in

spirit – meek/humble – peacemaker — mourning – merciful – hungry/thirsty for justice & righteousness...The greater your need – the deeper your longing – the heavier your flow of tears for a broken world – the more chewed up you are by a world that devours its own – God blesses you – God wraps you up covers you makes you overflow in grace...so that it spills out of you like saltiness from salt & light from a lamp on a stand. God blesses you so that the world will see God's handiwork in you. God blesses you so that the world will see forgiveness, mercy, faithfulness, endurance, self-sacrificing love...God blesses you over & over & over again not because you deserve it not because you've earned it not because you're special but because God's very nature is that Sower who won't stop sowing until something grows & flourishes... God's very nature is that Sower who is so extravagant & exudes abundance & is indiscriminate in his blessing...

The Parable of the Sower is about the Sower & nothing else. This parable opens our eyes to see & our hearts to receive our gracious extravagant God. You know it's foolish to spread seed on unfit soil. So does God, but he does it anyway. God loves with relentless reckless abandon. God sends rain on the just & the unjust. God pours his love into hearts that are at times rocky, weedy, hard-packed or maybe receptive/fertile. He sows his promises/word into the disciples who over & over & over again demonstrate hard hearts, stubborn souls, & little wisdom. Jesus continues to sow his life & love & presence & power into their lives. He never sends them away in anger or frustration. He continues to work with them, & continues to help them see what God is up to in the world around them. He sows the Gospel with wild generosity & even when it is clear that his disciples just don't get it, when they turn him over to the authorities, abandon him to his executioners, & deny knowing him; Jesus continues to pour out his love on them by inviting them back into his presence & into his sowing mission after the resurrection.

The world/Pharisees/all who operate on a profit-loss business model see in the Sower...inefficiency, wastefulness & futility...But in the extravagance of the Sower is the extravagance of love that always protects/trusts/hopes/perseveres In the lavishness of the Sower is love that says you are precious/cherished by the Father who will never stop sowing his love into your heart... never stop sowing his word into your life... never hold back his desire that you reach the fullness of joy in his presence... never withdraw his Spirit from working to draw you closer to him. In the excessiveness of the Sower there is also unyielding hope that from some corner of this field so profusely seeded a harvest will come. Jesus was also clear...the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of abundance...God w/holds no blessing & is never miserly with his gifts. There is no scarcity in the presence of the King which means we can live as generously & graciously as did Jesus & give as freely as we have received because we give & serve & love & forgive from an unlimited supply.

Two things the Parable doesn't specifically tell us.

First...The identity of the Sower...Certainly we assume it is the Father...but certainly Jesus assumes it is also us. Second...all the soils are sown...seed is sown in the unlikeliest unsuitable circumstances which surely suggests that it is not up to us to judge the fertility of any moment...Our call is to sow...to lavishly extravagantly & hopefully bring the promise of God's love in Jesus Christ to every situation & circumstance no matter how uninspiring infertile unreceptive it may appear. Our call is simply to be generous with love – extravagant with hope – unrestrained with forgiveness – abundant with mercy – prolific with joy...Because we have his promise: *Is 55:11 - It is the same with my word. I send it out, & it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, & it will prosper everywhere I send it.*

Remember...Jesus came to this world to produce people in whom the power of His kingdom bears fruit. Not to just take us away to heaven at some distant future point, but to make God's love & life & the reality of his rule of grace so real & present in us by his power that God's kingdom is evident in all we do. AND he sows his presence, love & power until the harvest comes & we get heaven in the bargain "*Blessed are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear.*"

Let's pray with that in mind:

**Jesus, in us, you sow yourself The Word of Truth, generously and The Word of Life, graciously. Defend us from the Evil One who seeks to snatch your blessing away. Fortify us for hard times and costly discipleship that we may endure. Deliver us from distraction, from worldly desires and from all that would lure us and choke us with false promises. Enrich us with every blessing of your Spirit that you will make us forever faithful and fruitful for you. We pray in your name...Amen.**