

Date: July 12, 2026 (7th Sunday after Pentecost, series A) (Proper 10)

Title: “The Sower”

Text: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ²Such large crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³Then he told them many things in parables, saying:

‘A sower went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown. ⁹Whoever has ears, let them hear.’ [...]

¹⁸‘Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹when anyone hears the message of the kingdom and does not understand it, the Evil One comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹But since it has no root in them, it lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²²The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This, of course, is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown.’

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It’s been *too wet* for *too long*, for our son Kevin to have done this yet. But he’s really looking forward to getting some grass growing again in his yard. What he *wants* is a lush carpet of thick and beautiful lawn! But the weather in the Edmonton area (where he and his family live) has been so unpredictable this year, that he just doesn’t know what to expect. On top of that, he plans to “hydroseed” this new lawn. That’s the process you’ve probably seen, here and there, where a crew sprays a mixture of sprouted grass seedlings and nutrients on top of the soil. It takes an extra month or so for hydroseeded grass to really get going (compared to sod), but once it gets established, apparently it’s even better.

Anyway, that’s the theory. We’ll see how Kevin’s project turns out! *However* it turns out, though, I see a number of connections, and points of contact, between his plan and the parable Jesus tells in today’s Gospel reading, about a sower who went out to sow *his* seed.

The first point of contact is actually a point of contrast. Sowing a lawn is a brand-new experiment for our son—a challenge he’s never taken on before. By contrast, the guy at the centre of Jesus’ story is “**a sower.**” (v.3) That’s who he is, and that’s what he does! And as our Old Testament reading (from Isaiah 55) suggests, this sower represents God himself. Not only does God provide the whole world with everything it needs to “**make the earth bud and flourish (so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater)**”—on top of that, God *also* sows the seed of his Word into our hearts, to give us a rich and abundant spiritual life as well. (Isa 55:10) Those, in fact, are the two characteristic things *our* God does, that all the other gods out there, don’t do. He cares for us in body *and* soul, physically *and* spiritually—not just one or the other.

Along with that, the God of the Bible is also “a *speaking* god.” He’s a God who reaches out to us, and wants to engage with us. He wants our understanding, not just our obedience. Twice, when Jesus explains this little story (in the second part of this reading), he emphasizes the need *to* “**understand**” the Word of God. (19, 23) It isn’t enough for us just to “**hear**” the words of Scripture, so that they go in one ear and out the other. Instead, as we prayed in our Prayer of the Day, God’s goal

is that we should “**hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest**” all the challenging (and wonderful!) things he tells us in his Word. That’s what makes it possible (as we prayed in that prayer) for us to “**embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life—[which is] through Jesus Christ, our Lord.**”

Notice, though—back in this parable—that Jesus tells us only one thing *in particular* about the *content* of this Word (that this “**sower**” sows). Jesus calls it “**the message of the kingdom**” (literally, “**the word of the kingdom**”). (19) What does that mean? One possibility is that “**the message of the kingdom**” is a message *about* the kingdom—a message that points us *toward* God’s kingdom... and shows us where it is... and tells us what we need to do to enter it.

That’s helpful to some extent, of course. The downside is that that understanding leaves all the initiative with us. Understanding “**the message of the kingdom**” in this way leaves you and me with the burden of *acting* on that word, and *doing* what it says, to find our own way *into* the kingdom of God.

That’s why it’s “*even-better news*” to realize that “**the message of the kingdom**” can also be understood as “**a message that brings us the kingdom**”—in other words, it’s a message that has the kingdom of God itself as its content, so that the hearing (and understanding) of that Word, *all by itself*, is what draws us *into* that kingdom, and *makes* it our own.

The way this story unfolds, I think it’s this second option that Jesus really has in mind, when he calls this seed that the sower sows, “**the message of the kingdom.**” That seed has the power of life itself, built right into it! It sprouts, it grows, it sends down roots, it shoots up quickly with promise and vigour, *and* (when everything works together “just so,” the way God intends) it produces a rich and beautiful harvest—already now in life, and (even more abundantly) in the *fullness* of God’s kingdom, in the life of the world to come. “**A hundred, sixty, or [even just] thirty times what was sown!**” (8, 23) Can you believe it? That’s the awesome kind of harvest Jesus anticipates, *from* the sowing of his word! Isn’t that terrific?

Notice though that Jesus doesn’t tell us anything at all (here in this story) about *how* this life-giving seed of God’s Word gets sown. All he says is that the sower “**sows**” it by “**scattering it.**” (4)

To us, that probably sounds kind of careless, compared to the very purposeful way we sow most of our seeds, in our gardens. This one goes *here* and that one goes *there*—every single one of them pushed down to just the right depth, and properly spaced, maybe even with a bit of bone-meal in the bottom of each hole to help them all grow. One hundred percent germination is our goal, so we can get a great harvest from every single seed!

Compared to that, what God does with the seed of his Word sounds more like that *hydro-seeding* process that our son Kevin plans to do in his yard! This sower just “**scatters... the message of the kingdom**” all over the place—onto the *path*, onto the *rocky* ground, even into *that nasty old weedy patch* over there (as well as into this “**good soil**” over here, that really seems [to us] to be the *only* kind of soil *worth* bothering about).

As crazy as that approach sounds, in *gardening* terms, it’s totally true to life, in *spiritual* terms. Let me ask you: How many seeds of God’s Word have fallen into the marginal soil (or sometimes even the hostile soil) of *your* life? The ministry that you have called me to carry out, here in your midst—and the ministry that Vicar Nick is devoting himself to as well, this next year, as an intern or student-pastor—this ministry that God provides in our midst is often simply called “**the ministry of the Word.**” That’s because the Word is the *only* power pastors really have, and the *seed* of the Word is the only real “*tool*” God gives us, to help you with. That’s why people like me and Vicar Nick *scatter* “**the seed of God’s Word**” so freely (and so generously) into your lives—every chance we get.

- Here in the pulpit, sermons *spring up* from the Word, and *try* to scatter all kinds of different seeds into your lives—so that some of them, at least, will sprout and grow.
- Over there (in the Bible-study room), we *cultivate* the Word—stimulating its growth, and giving you another good set of fresh cuttings and shoots to take home.
- When we visit your homes, we bring along some of the *fruits* of God’s Word, and again we do our level best to sow them into your hearts and lives, as we talk about this and that.
- In our prayers, we channel *nutrients* from the fullness of God’s Word into some of those particular places in your lives where we see they are really so much needed.

The Word, in other words, is all that any of us really have, that does *any* of us *any* real good. All the other wisdom we come up with, is sort of like an artificial plant. It looks good, it pretties up the room, and it truly does fill a real need, to some extent. But it never quite has the same living, changing, and life-giving vitality that God’s Word always has, in such abundance. That’s why all of us Christians—pastors and vicars, members and guests—gather ourselves together *around* God’s Word, every chance we get. What kind of seed is God going to “**scatter**” into our hearts today? What kind of new growth is he going to foster?

Along with this generous, abundant, reckless kind of “**scattering**” that this sower specializes in, the other main part of this story centres on the four different kind of “soil” that “**the message of God’s kingdom**” lands in. The way Jesus tells it, these soils stand for four different kinds of people.

- Some people (Jesus says) “**hear the Word of the kingdom, but don’t understand it.**” That’s not because they’re such bad people, but because “**the Evil One comes and snatches away**” that Word that God really wanted to “**sow in their heart.**” (19) The last thing the Adversary wants is for the Word of God to really get down deep inside of us, and change us! That’s why that Adversary does whatever he can to make us *forget* what the Bible says... or *set it aside*... or decide that it really isn’t even for us, in the first place.
 - I’m sure we all know “other people” we *see* those things happening to. And what a great tragedy that is. But in some ways it’s also probably happening to us too, in this or that part of our life, even as Christians. Are there topics, teachings, doctrines, or sayings in the Bible that the Evil One has been trying to “**snatch away**” from *you*?
- The second “human situation” Jesus describes is “**a person who hears the Word and receives it with joy—but since that Word has no root within them, it lasts only a short time.**” (21) We see that here too, in our church, from time to time—and sometimes in our families as well. Somebody hears about Jesus their Saviour for the first time (or in a fresh kind of way)—and *boom*, they’re excited, they’re here in worship, they’re taking it all in, they’re full of new life! But then, it all starts to wilt. As Jesus says (back in this little story), “**the sun comes up, and those plants get scorched; they wither (because the soil is so shallow), and they have no root.**” (5-6)
 - Again, thinking about other people is one thing. But are there places where you and I see this sad situation unfolding in *our* lives too? Jesus talks about “**trouble or persecution coming along because of the Word, and causing us to fall away.**” (21) Where has *our* faith, or Christian life, gotten withered, faded, or scorched, because of hard things we have had to go through—in the church, or in other parts of our life?
- The third kind of “soil” Jesus talks about is where the seed “**falls among thorns, which spring up and choke the plants.**” (7) In spiritual terms, this is what happens when “**the worries of this life, and the deceitfulness of wealth, choke the Word and make it unfruitful.**” (22) There’s no quick *crisis* involved, in this kind of situation: no *severe* or *acute* or *sudden* hardship, just the slow and

subtle pressure of “other things, other commitments, and other priorities,” crowding out our focus and attention on God’s Word. “This Sunday we’ve got company; next Sunday we’re gone, then it’s the golf tournament... then it’s something else.”

- Again, we hear those excuses rolling out of other people’s mouths, but where do we ourselves come up with our own excuses, when it comes to our devotional life? Our participation in Bible study? Our growth in Christian service? Where are “**the thorns springing up in our lives, to choke out**” the new life that God has given us through faith in Jesus?
- Thankfully— isn’t it a relief to hear Jesus finally getting around to talking about a fourth kind of soil— “**good soil!**”—soil that actually “**produces a crop**”! (8, 23) This, Jesus says, “**refers to someone who hears the Word and understands it.**” (23) They “get it,” and it “clicks” for them, that they *need* God’s forgiveness for all of their sin, and all of the strength and help and hope that God provides in all of their struggles. And the Word of God not only takes away all of those *negative* things (as it works its way into our hearts and lives): it also “**produces a harvest**”—many times greater than that tiny little seed the Lord himself sowed. Remember!—that’s what God promised, way back there in Isaiah: that “**his Word that goes out from his mouth will not return to him empty, but will accomplish what he desires and achieve the purpose for which he sends it.**” (Isa 55:10-11)
 - As you and I reflect on our lives, I think there are probably plenty of places where we can say, “Wow—look at that! Look how God has *changed* me—here, and there, and over there too. He really made me blossom. I can do this, and that, and this other good thing too, because of the strength that He himself gives me!”
 - And of course, what a joyful thing it is to see this happening in the lives of other Christians also—friends here at church, and in the wider community, and even (I hope) within our families too. In Isaiah’s words, “[**All of**] **this will be for the Lord’s renown**”—literally, all of this harvest “**will make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that will endure forever.**” (Isa 55:13)

The Lord, you see, is the one who cares enough about *all* these kinds of soil, to keep on sowing his Word *into* all of them. The Lord is not a stingy or grumpy sower who turns off the seed-supply when he discovers he’s dealing with a patch of stony ground, or weedy ground, or hardpan along the path (in any of our lives). As we sang a few minutes ago, God is like a sower who sows with “**reckless love.**” (“Preach You The Word, v.3)

“**Though some be snatched and some be scorched**” (the hymn-writer says),
“**and some be choked and matted flat**”—

even so, “**the sower sows; his heart cries out, ‘Oh, what of that, and what of that?’**” (v.4)

In other words, God is not going to *stop* doing what he *needs* and *wants* and *loves* to do, just because some of *us* make it difficult and unrewarding for him to do it.

He’s a sower! That’s who he is, and that’s what he does. So—

- Thanks be to God for *all the people* whose hearts he opens, to receive the gift of his Word.
- Thanks be to God for all the *human* sowers from whom *we* receive his Word.
- Thanks be to God for his Word itself, which exposes our sin, and leads us to Christ, and produces in our lives—“**a hundred, or sixty, or even just thirty times what was sown.**” (23)
- *Thanks* be to God! Amen.