

9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Text: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23  
Preacher: The Rev. R. Bruce Todd

St. Peter's - Lafayette Hill, PA.  
July 13, 2008

### “Cast It Aside”

"I want to start a garden, but my yard's a little problematic," a customer told the owner at the yard and garden center. "I get blazing afternoon sunshine for about two hours, but otherwise it's all shade." "What kind of soil?" asked the proprietor. "Hard clay, lot of rocks," said the customer, "What do you recommend I plant?" "Hmmm," thought the store owner. "Why don't you look down Aisle B. We've got a big new supply of birdbaths and flagpoles."

Maybe your lawn is like that. Good for growing only birdbaths and flagpoles. Should the type of soil decide whether or not you should plant seeds? The disciples were thinking "yes". If you have no guarantee that the seeds will grow, why bother to even plant them?

Knowing this mind set, Jesus told a parable about a farmer who went out to sow seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, said Jesus, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

There are many times when Jesus tells a parable and we're left to figure out what he might have meant. But Jesus' disciples asked him to explain this parable. Jesus replied, "When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

Now there are some things that are presented in this parable. The farmer is God. And the seed is the message of the Kingdom. But today I want to focus on the good soil that yields a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Because that good soil is you and me. We are those who have received the message of the kingdom and have said yes to it. Because we are co-laborers with God, it is now our turn to sow seed. We have said "Yes" to being God's gardeners. We are the ones who are now casting the seeds of faith. But what kind of crop are we producing? What seeds are we sowing?

Here are some things we need to know about sowing seed. Let's begin with one of the most important. You don't have to be someone special to sow seeds of the kingdom of God. You don't have to be a superstar. You don't have to be a celebrity. One of the surest teachings of scripture is that anybody can be used by God to do the work of the kingdom.

Let me tell you a story told by James Billington, Librarian of Congress and a student of Russian history. Billington happened to be in Moscow in August of 1991. It was a tense and dangerous time, with the old Soviet regime giving way to a new social order. Boris Yeltzin and a small group of defenders occupied the Russian White House and successfully managed to face off an enormous number of tanks and troops poised to attack, and to restore the old guard in the Soviet Union. Surprisingly, a key role in this successful resistance was played, said Billington, by the babushkas, the "old women in the church." These bandana-wearing old grandmothers, who had kept the orthodox church alive for years during the Soviet period, had been the butt of jokes by both Russians and Westerners alike. Nothing could have seemed more pathetic and irrelevant than they were, hunched over and wrapped in woolen shawls. They were widely viewed as evidence of the eventual death of religion in the Soviet Union.

But on that critical night of August 20, 1991, when martial law was proclaimed and people were commanded to go to their homes, many of these women disobeyed and went to the place of the confrontation. Some of them fed the protestors in a public display of support. Others staffed medical stations, others prayed for a miracle, while still others, astoundingly, climbed up onto the tanks, peered through the slits at the crew-cut men inside, and told them there were new orders, these orders were from God: "Thou shall not kill." The young men stopped the tanks. "The attack," said Billington, "never came."

You don't have to be extraordinarily gifted to help determine the history of a nation or even the world. Few of the heroes of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, are not heroic at all. A young kid named David, stood before the giant Goliath, with nothing more than a sling-shot. Moses was known as a person who could barely make it through a complete sentence without stuttering. Jonah was an ordinary person who did not want to go to Ninevah. And the Disciples were fishermen, a tax collector, a tent maker, ordinary people. But God still used them, just as God can use us. You don't have to be someone special to sow seeds of the kingdom of God. But you do have to have Commitment.

On June 1, 2001, a young Arab man named Saeed Hotari strapped a load of explosives to his body and walked into downtown Tel Aviv. He waited until he was surrounded by a crowd of Israeli citizens, and then Hotari triggered the bombs. Twenty-one Israelis died along with Hotari in the blast. As soon as the news reached Saeed Hotari's community, his family and friends began celebrating. To them, he is a hero. The Palestinians who commit these bombings, and those who celebrate them, believe that a jihad, an act of holy war, is the highest form of religious service. And anyone who dies in a jihad is guaranteed to go straight to Paradise, where, according to the Muslim holy book, the Koran, he will enjoy unlimited sex

with 72 beautiful virgins. The Hamas, the militant Palestinian group that is behind these bombings, believes in educating young children in the glories of jihad. There are signs along the walls in Hamas-run schools extolling the heroism of suicide bombings. An eleven-year-old boy in one Hamas school announced, "I will make my body a bomb that will blast the flesh of Zionists. I will tear their bodies into little pieces and cause them more pain than they will ever know."

Saeed Hotari's proud father remarks that he hopes Saeed's brothers and friends follow his example and become suicide bombers, too. He says, "There is no better way to show God you love him." That's scary. It's misguided of course, even a bit demonic, but it's also a level of commitment that most of us don't know anything about. There is a better way to show your love to God. Rather than dying for God, how about living for God?

How about becoming a sower of seed? You don't have to be someone special to sow seeds of the kingdom, but you do need to be committed. You do have to know what you believe and you have to give yourself completely to that belief. And that commitment is to plant the seeds. Communicate! Tell God's message of love and forgiveness. Share the news of the promise of Eternal Life. Our faith grew because someone planted those seeds within us. It might have been a parent, a pastor, a teacher or a friend, but someone planted that seed of faith. Just as with any plant, as it grows and matures it produces new seeds. If those seeds aren't planted there will be no new plants.

I am pretty sure I have mentioned before one of the things I do in a New Member's Class. I ask "What brought you to our Church?" I will never forget one young mother who said, "I was walking through the Mall with my 5 year old son. He looked in one of the gift shops and asked me, 'Mommy - why is that man hanging on those sticks?' He was looking at a Crucifix. That is when I realized that faith isn't simply inherited - it has to be taught."

And the seeds of faith that grew within us, may not take root in the same way in this new Generation. Communication can be affected by whether the sender and the receiver share the same experiences. One man said he took his family to one of those restaurants where the walls are plastered with movie memorabilia. He went to see the hostess about reserving a table. When he returned, he found his 11-year-old daughter staring at a poster of Superman standing in a phone booth. She looked puzzled. "Doesn't she know who Superman is?" he whispered to his wife. "Worse than that," she replied. "She doesn't know what a phone booth is."

Communication between generations can suffer because of a lack of shared experiences. I remember my Mother's comment when she heard a Rock Group doing a version of Amazing Grace. She said, "How sacrilegious!" I asked her why she thought so? The words were the same, the message of God's Grace was the same. The message was just being carried by a different vehicle. That was one of the times I did get my mother to change her mind.

But for many of us God's word of Grace and Forgiveness may have been planted in the soil of traditional hymns played on a piano or organ and sung by a traditional choir. But for others, they are a different type of soil. They might not even give that traditional sound a chance. But put God's message to a Rock beat, or a Country Tune, or to Rap, and the message will begin to grow in an entirely different type of soil.

As a Church Musician I was at one church that wanted to add a Contemporary Service. Here I was, a musician trained in Organ, playing Bach and Mozart, now sitting behind a synthesizer surrounded by a drummer, bass player, Guitar, and 3 singers, playing music by Keith Thomas, Amy Grant and other Contemporary Christians Composers. If you would have asked me if I'd ever be doing that 5 years earlier I would say "No Way!" But the interesting this was, attendance at that service increased 40%! We were always planting the seeds of God's message of Grace and Forgiveness, we just started planting those seeds in some different type of soil. Some people are inspired by music and a song. Some people are inspired by someone sitting and talking with them about how their faith has affected their life. For others, it might have been one of the many movies they saw about a religious theme. And for others it might simply be holding their hand in a time of need and offering a silent prayer. Our task is to Plant the Seeds in all types of Soil. Let God take care of being the Gardener. Some gardens are only good for planting Bird Baths and Flag Poles. But the field of God's Kingdom here on Earth contains rich soil for the Seeds of God's Love.

You may not have to be special to plant seeds for the Kingdom of God. But planting seeds for the Kingdom of God goes a long way in making you feel special. Amen