

Seeds

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Introduction

I want to begin by offering an expression of thanksgiving for everyone who helps make our Grace Garden a meaningful ministry for our church and in our community. There may be other church gardens in the area, but I don't of any that surpass what we have here at Grace.

I, along with the rest of the Grace staff, have the great joy of pulling into the parking lot each day and seeing the incredible growth and beauty out there. If you haven't seen it recently, I encourage you to take an extra few minutes when you are in this area to walk out there.

And as you do, stop for a moment and pray for those in our community who are hungry for whatever reason. And then give God thanks that you are not.

You know, I have been a part of this congregation for 13 years now – since the second Sunday in July of 2007. My wife, daughter and I visited that day. We sat in the back row of the section closest to the choir. Throughout our time here that garden has been a constant. Last year was a lean year because we had too much rain at planting time and not enough rain the rest of the season. But every other year, I have expected to see what I see when I look at it today.

Farmers – and backyard gardeners, for that matter – are optimists. Every year they expect to see a great harvest from their efforts. The farmer in today's text was no different. He knew that, depending on the conditions, his efforts at sowing the seed would eventually produce a crop ...

Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. (Matthew 13:8)

But to get to the harvest, there were several important principles that had to be applied first.

#1: THE PLANTING PRINCIPLE

Verse 3:

A farmer went out to sow his seed. (Matthew 13:3)

The first principle simply says that the seeds have to be sown. Seeds cannot produce a harvest if they are never put into the ground.

Last fall I was searching through the cabinet in my garage where I keep all of the outdoor tools and equipment. I was looking for another bottle of oil for my chain saw. And there in the back of that cabinet, behind the oil, behind the weed killer, behind

the brake fluids and wiper fluids, I found a brown paper sack with seeds in it. Sweet corn! I love sweet corn. I don't know how old those seeds were, but the bag itself indicated I bought those seeds at the Handy Andy Hardware. There hasn't been a Handy Andy in Springfield for 25 years!

Those seeds were safe and dry in that bag, but they were not producing a harvest because they had never been planted. Think about what I missed!

And I have no one to blame except myself. I had the seeds. I'm the one who never planted them. I don't know why I never planted them, but I'm sure I had a very good reason.

You see, the text makes it clear. A farmer went out to sow his seed. It was his seed and so it was his responsibility to sow that seed. And that makes perfect sense to us, doesn't it?

Now, jump to the end of the reading. When Jesus interprets the parable in the second half of the reading, he explains that the seed is

... the message about the kingdom ... (Matthew 13:18)

It is the story of faith. It is the good news. And Jesus leads us to understand that whoever has that seed – that story of faith, that good news about Jesus – bears the responsibility to get the seed out of the barn and get it into the soil.

You and I are the farmers in this parable. To each of us has been give the seed of the kingdom, and to each of us has been given the responsibility of sowing that seed in the fields around us. Planting seeds in the lives and hearts of people.

That leads us to the next principle.

#2: THE PREDICTABILITY PRINCIPLE

The predictability principle basically says that ultimately the sowing process is unpredictable. Once you sow the seed, you lose a little bit of control over what happens next.

Farming today is far more scientific than it was in the days of Jesus. But those ancient Palestinians had little other choice than to cast it and hope it landed in a good spot.

... some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. (Matthew 13:4)

Some of those seeds would fall along the path, and because the ground was hard and unyielding the seed would never have a chance to penetrate the soil. And so it did not last long, and it never produced the desire harvest.

But the farmer did his job. He sowed the seed.

Some people's hearts aren't ready to hear the good news. At some point in time every one of us is more receptive to hearing from God than we are at other times. And over time, every heart can be softened and receptive. But those hearts will never be penetrated unless some farmer sows the seed.

Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. (Matthew 13:5)

Some of the seed falls in places where it looks like it is responding well, but it doesn't last long. It just never seems to grow good roots. There is not a lot of depth to that soil.

A lot of people are like that. Everything about their lives operates at a very shallow level. They don't let anything penetrate too deeply.

Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. (Matthew 13:7)

We are going to talk more about weeds next week, but for now view these weeds as other plants that are competing for the same space in the soil.

Our lives only have a limited capacity to take things in. 24 hours a day. 7 days a week. That's all the time any of us have. And if you let them, the things that are not consistent with the kingdom will choke out the good seeds of the kingdom. Something eventually has to win out.

But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. (Matthew 13:23)

And, praise God, there will be some soil where the seed produces the harvest.

But from our vantage point as a Palestinian farmer, we can't predict which soil is around us. Predicting isn't our responsibility. Planting is. And so we faithfully and diligently sow the good news, all the while know that the results are beyond our control.

That's a good word for those of you who are praying for the salvation of someone you love. How that person responds is beyond your control. But keep sowing. Which brings us to the final principle.

#3: THE PATIENCE PRINCIPLE

I don't like stories that leave me with unanswered questions. I don't want to wait until next season to find out how the cliff hanger is resolved. I want to know if the guy gets the girl and the she is cured from the rare disease she has.

A couple of weeks ago I started watching a Netflix series while I was working on our income taxes. It was eight episodes, and consistently watched them two at a time. Until

episode six finished. Just before the end of that episode something happened that caused me to cry out, "No way! I didn't see that coming." It was already passed my bedtime, but I had to watch those last two episodes ... because I don't like it when my questions are unanswered.

So when I read today's I want to know how big was this farmer's crop? Did it yield ...

... a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. (Matthew 13:23)

We aren't told, are we? We are only told that the farmer sower his seed. We will never know whether it was a good year or a lean year.

This story is about one day in the life of a farmer. And as every farmer and gardener knows, you don't harvest the crop on the day you plant the seed. Seeds germinate at different rates. But all of them take time. Which means I need to be patient for while God does His work to make the seeds grow.

The first reading today reminded us that God is indeed at work whenever His Word is planted. Remember what that passage said?

*As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)*

At some point in our academic careers every one of us probably brought home a Dixie filled with dirt, and in that cup of dirt our teachers helped us plant a seed. Some of you waited patiently. Some of us dug the seed up every day to see how it was doing. If you waited, you soon began to see a sprout. But before that could happen, you had to apply the patience principle.

APPLICATION

I am wondering where you fit into this text today. In these next few moments, allow God's spirit to speak deep into your heart so that you can see you.

- Maybe God is saying, "Plant that seed." There is this person who keeps coming to your mind. Perhaps you've thought about inviting them to read the Bible with you, or you've wondered what would happen if you offered to pray with them about a struggle they are having. It could be any number of things, but right God is telling "plant the seed. I want to start growing something in their lives, but you need to plant the seed."

- Maybe God is saying, "Stop trying to predict where the seed will land." Sometime we think we strategize our sowing process. We use phrases like "it's not the right time" or "she will never be open to hearing about Jesus." We have this need to control what happens when we sow our seed. And God is saying "let go. You planted. Let me grow the crop."
- Or maybe God is saying, "Be patient." He needs us to remember that it takes time for a seed to be ready for the harvest. And he needs us to remember that His Word always results in the harvest He intended. So right now God is saying to you "stop digging up those beans!"
- To some of you God is saying, "You are ready to be harvested." Someone in the past planted the seed in your heart, and God has been growing it. And now it's time for you to respond.

Whatever God is saying, I encourage you to do it. That thing, whatever it is, is the next step in your faith journey.

Let's pray ...

Amen.