

Extravagant Sower

Preached on 7/13/2014 by Pastor Brahm Semmler Smith at Trinity Lutheran Church

Based on Psalm 65 and Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Sister and brothers in Christ, grace and peace be with you all!

A few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of traveling to Colorado with 21 youth and 6 adults to Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp. Our pics are up on the screen, as our groups were ready with backpacks on our backs to start hiking. During this week, we got out into God's great creation, backpacking into the mountains, camping, hiking, and finishing our trip rafting down the Arkansas River. This morning, to begin our sermon, I am going to invite some of these young people up to share about our trip.

Our Psalm this morning, that we read together, reminds us of the power of God and God's great nature. It is also a great Psalm to use when talking about the God of creation.

Psalm 65 says: By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might.

You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples.

Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs;

It is a reminder of God's grandeur and power. Of God's prominence and place in our world. Who is able to silence the seas? Who is able to create massive mountains? Who is the one who brings about fields of plenty? Why none else than the God of our Salvation! While we were out in the mountains, and especially as we climbed higher and higher, above the tree line, we were especially reminded of God's power and magnificence. What began as lush mountain valleys turned into dryer landscape as we climbed, where the higher we went, the smaller the trees became. And then, no trees at all. And then, no grass! As we climbed and looked out, and saw the paths and roads down in the valley, when we saw the cloud shadows on the floor of the world, when we stood on the top of a mountain, the enormity of creation is hard to miss. The enormity, and the small feeling that comes with it. How fragile we humans are, huffing and puffing to get up a mountain. How great God is, to place these things here.

This is the great and powerful God we are talking about, the God of Salvation, the God who created mountains, the God who sowed the seeds of creation throughout our world and universe. The same God who came in the form of Jesus, who came into being in one of these small, fragile bodies like ours, who climbed mountains like us, who ate and slept and cried like us, and who taught us in parables, like the parable we had today. A parable about a sower, who planted seeds.

Today's parable is a very recognizable one, in which Jesus tells about a farmer who indiscriminately throws his seeds out into the air, and they fall on four kinds of soil. Four kinds of soil. A flattened path, a rocky patch of land, land that was overrun with weeds, and finally, good soil. And predictably, all but the good soil fail in producing any fruit.

When we first hear the parable, we tend to really focus on the soil. Which kind of soil are we? And who is that other kind of soil? If we think highly of ourselves, of course we are good soil. If we are really hard on ourselves, we are one of the bad soils. We know which one we want to be, but if we are honest with ourselves, I think in reality, we all have parts of each kind of soil in our lives. I in my life have been good soil, rocky soil, pounded up soil, and thorny soil.

But what if this parable is not primarily about the soil. What if it is about something else? Barbara Brown Taylor, in her book called "Seeds of Heaven," writes about this parable... "If that is what this parable is about, (which soil we are), then it would be called the parable of the different kind of grounds. Instead, it has been known for centuries as the parable of the Sower." What if this parable isn't primarily about our birds, rocks, thorns, and successes, but the extravagance of a sower who doesn't seem to care about these things but just flings seeds as far and as much as he can? The key to the story does not hinge on the soil, but on this crazy, generous beyond belief sower, who continues to go back into his bag and throw out more seed, no matter where it falls.

This parable is about the God of our Salvation, over and over again planting seeds of truth, grace and love in our lives. This is a parable about a sower planting seeds.

And for myself, I think this offers a great image of what Christ's church is about. Or should be about. That we are in the business of planting seeds. And not just any kind of seeds, but Word of God seeds. Seeds that grow and sprout and mature into seeds of faith, of grace, of love of God. We are in the business of planting seeds. This trip with these teenagers to Colorado, while about fun and adventure, was about planting seeds. When I meet with a family about baptizing their child, it is about planting seeds. When we study the bible with our adult text study on Thursday mornings, it is about planting seeds. When we venture out into our community to serve our neighbors, our schools, and our most vulnerable, we are planting seeds. When we pray with our families at dinner or before bed, we are planting seeds. When we advocate for justice and peace in our world in the name of Christ, we are planting seeds. We are in the business of planting seeds. Or maybe more correctly, God is in the business of planting seeds in us.

The hard part of this, at least for me, is that I always don't know how the seeds are going to grow. If they are going to grow? I am not like that sower all the time. I like to take care to make sure the seeds I plant grow. It can be hard for me to let go and trust that God is there planting seeds with me. But then I think of those throughout my life who have planted seeds of faith in me. The people God used to plant seeds in me. Think about who those people are for you. A parent. A pastor. A friend. A Sunday school teacher. A child. A 90 year old never been married retired professor who loved cats. All of these people, and more, have sowed seeds of faith in your life. And your faith is the fruit of their, and God's labor, and their love and care for you. Thinking about how they shared this seed with you. Were they stingy about it? Or were they extravagant with their love and care and concern for you? Extravagant like the sower in the parable? Which way is most likely to succeed in growing faith?

"Let anyone with ears listen!" Jesus yells this out in the midst of this passage today. Sisters and brothers in Christ, listen to the one who loves us so much, the one who created the heavens and earth and yet came into being in the one we know as Jesus Christ. We all have seeds of faith planted in us. Seeds of God's extravagant love, God continues to sow and sow and sow. And God produces harvests that are 100 fold, 60 fold, 30 fold, so much greater than what we think is possible. May the God with the power to still the seas and make firm the mountains, continue to sow seeds of faith, grace, and love in our lives with abandon. Amen.