



SERMONS THAT WORK

Pentecost 6 Proper 10 (A)

Seeds and Soil

[RCL]: Genesis 25:19-34; Psalm 119:105-112; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

Let us begin with an invocation of the Holy Spirit by John Henry Newman:

Come, O Holy Spirit.

Come as Holy Fire and burn in us,

Come as Holy Wind and cleanse us,

Come as Holy Light and lead us,

Come as Holy Life and dwell within us.

Convict us, convert us, consecrate us,

Until we are set free from the service of ourselves,

To be your servants to the world. AMEN.

Imagine you are at the lake and you just got done taking the boat out. It's hot, but not that humid – a perfect day to be outside. The kids are playing on the beach and you are setting out all the things you need for a picnic. Suddenly, you see one of the local farmers come toward you. He's whistling a happy tune and flinging seeds right and left, without caring about where they are going. "Hey!" you say, "That just went in my drink." He just smiles and continues to toss the seeds about, as he replies, "I've got plenty." Your children run up to you and say, "That man is throwing seeds in the water and on the dock – will they grow?" You shake your head, puzzled, as you watch him walk away, throwing the seed – wasting the seed – for no apparent purpose, except that he's got plenty.

Now if that isn't arresting, I don't know what is! Those who are part of agricultural communities never waste anything, especially any of their seed, since that is their means of living. Our Gospel today tells us a strange and vivid story, but when we look a little bit deeper, it might not be so strange after all. Think about it – when we witness the birth of a child, accomplish a hard-earned goal, our favorite team wins, or we receive a birthday present that we are overjoyed about, aren't we so happy that we are about to burst? We're just bubbling over and feel we have to share our good news with others. We don't care what kind of day they have been having or if they know us or if they even care; we just have to share our joy. We're throwing it everywhere with abandon—we've got plenty!

Isn't that what the sower in our parable is doing? The seed is so abundant, the sower doesn't care where it goes. What that sower trusts is that God will provide the response in the hearts of the people where the Word is being sowed. God's generous abundance keeps overflowing in us so that we are compelled to share it with others.

And what about those others? Jesus further elaborates on his own parable by describing each of the different soils where the seeds land. This is about the cycle of sowing and reaping; telling and hearing; sharing and responding. Now, we all know people from each of these soil "types" and most of us shift between one soil and another - sometimes on the same day or even within an hour. We'd like to believe that we are the good soil, but if we are honest, we probably aren't - at least not all the time.

As human beings, we are complex creations of thoughts, feelings, and the ability to act on them. When we experience discomfort, we want it to go away and may act impulsively in order to find comfort or release from pain and anxiety. We all have experienced this—whether shopping, gambling, food, sex, our tempers, drinking, lying—you name it. Sometimes it isn't a big deal, but sometimes the little things add up to extremely damaging consequences, both for ourselves and those close to us.

Right now, in the news and on social media, we are seeing deaths from COVID-19, deaths from violence, relationship struggles, job loss, bankruptcies, and despair from anxiety, causing people to behave reactively with dire consequences. These things take root from a seed misleadingly small—the desire to be our own God - a desire to have what we want, when we want it, regardless of the costs or who else may be affected. Augustine of Hippo astutely reminds us that no one should "say that he [or she] is more worthy of life than others," and if we are to "seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving [our neighbors as ourselves]," (BCP 293) then this is the standard toward which we must grow.

The Bible is full of people putting themselves before God and their neighbors. Look at Esau today. He comes in from the field, ravenous because he had been working hard. Jacob knows this and takes advantage of it. He knows that all that Esau can think about is food, and that is his immediate need. So, Jacob tells him that he can have food if he gives him his birthright. A birthright was important in those times - a person could sell it or renounce it, but there were consequences. It would be like trading in your entire inheritance for a Big Mac after an intense day of working outside. Burgers are good - but not that good! When we are focused on our own desires, our envy, our fits of rage, our discord, our hatred—the good soil of our hearts turns into a wasteland.

Those impulses can get us into loads of trouble; when we give in without tempering them with our call from God, we end up with no depth of spirit, choked with the thorns of the world. We yield nothing, and our actions break the cycle of abundance. Others do not experience the love of God through us and we have lost the chance to share the abundance we received.

Have you ever met someone that you immediately feel is a *holy* person? There is something about the way they move and live and have their being that speaks to you on a soul level. We might say they are living in the Spirit and, oh, how we long for what they have! But we have those qualities as well. They are the seeds that were first planted in us when we heard the Word of God from a sower, nurtured in us by baptism, and enriched by coming together in community for strength and renewal. Seeds sown in the good soil of our hearts blossom into the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

If the seeds of God's love flower into these fruits, then what do those new seeds look like? There is pollination, cross-pollination, and new growth all over the place! The cycle of sowing begins again. God's abundant love sees to that. We go about our daily business, living in faithfulness in God's abundance and being sowers among those we encounter. We don't often get to see where the seeds fall, but the point is that we continue to sow. The Church's mission and our mission is to spread the Good News to every end of the Earth. Archbishop William Temple said, "The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members." This still holds true for us today. There are infinite ways for us to be the Church he describes: by giving a smile to someone who is feeling lonely, watching the kids so a couple can have some time to themselves, donating money to an organization that helps those who are marginalized, speaking up for a neighbor when you witness an injustice occurring, praying for those you dislike – the list can go on and on.

We are both the sowers and the soil. Without the one, the other would not make sense. When we go forth today, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit, may we sow abundantly, and may the seed that is sown in you bear the plentiful fruit of God's love. Amen.

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