Throwing Out Seeds

Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23; 31-32 Kimby Young

 October 15, 2017

Seed stories are found throughout the Bible. Jesus told many parables about seeds or harvests or growing plants and fields. Today’s scripture passages are just 2 such stories. Seeds probably make so many scriptural appearances for several reasons. Seeds and growing plants were familiar in an agricultural economy like Palestine of Jesus day. Symbolically, seeds represent life, growth, future hope. Seeds start small and turn into something great. Seeds are valuable, but seeds alone are not as valuable as what they yield down the line with time and work and care and patience. Seeds are a great image. No wonder they appear so often in the bible. Even today, if I say – “the seed of an idea” or “seeds of hope” – you know what I mean.

So in today’s first parable – the farmer went out to sow his seeds. The person hearing this story would understand what that means. The farmer went to work. The farmer did what he always did in the spring to make a living and to feed his family. The farmer went out to start the cycle of life – to start the season which leads to growth which leads to the harvest. Now farming has changed a lot since Jesus’ day, but even then, the farmer would have been more careful in the planting then this story implies. Even then the farmer plowed the field, tilled the soil and prepared the ground for the seeds. So in the parable when Jesus said, some fell on the path, some fell on the rocks and some fell on shallow soil – the people hearing the story as Jesus told it would understand this is not realistic for a good farmer to do – Jesus is trying to make a point. And their ears would perk up as ours do to say, “what is the point Jesus is trying to make?” We understand that Jesus is drawing an analogy. Jesus is trying to teach us something about God or about our ministry or about life in general. So what do the seeds represent? What does the path, the rocky soil, the shallow soil and the fertile soil tell us?

Most parables in the Bible are not interpreted in the Bible. The parable of the good Samaritan, the parable of the lost coin – they are not interpreted – we have tried to figure out the meanings for ourselves through the centuries. And in most cases, we can understand deeper meanings. If we try to understand, if we try to listen for God’s message, we generally can figure it out and grow from the story. But for some reason, this particular story IS interpreted in the scripture a few verses later. The seed is the word of God – the good news of Jesus Christ. And the various types of soil are the various people or the various ways that people receive or don’t receive the good news. Snatched away by evil before it takes root. Shallow or not deep enough to stand up to hard times. Choked out by bad influences or bad situations. Or healthy seed that grows deep and is nurtured well so that it produces good fruit for the next generation. It’s a great parable – a multi-layered parable – that has been shared and interpreted for many generations of faithful Christian living.

The challenge is to interpret it for today, for this time and this place, for you and me and this congregation and this community. What does this parable have to say to us today?

Now I’m going to turn this sermon into an interactive discussion, and actually ask for your responses. I’m going to come a little closer so I can hear your answers and we can talk about this lesson. Pretend you are in Sunday school or a Bible study. What does this parable have to say to us today? (answers)

Are we the farmers or are we the soil receiving the seeds? (answers)

Both – first we are the soil – receiving the seeds. Then we are the farmers sharing the seeds with others.

The seed is the word of God, the love of God, the grace of God.

So if we are the soil – how do we improve our chances of being good soil? (answers)

Example of the birds on the path – don’t let evil snatch away the good news. Hold on to what is good.

Try to keep the birds away – the temptations and the people who would pick the good news away from you. Be your own scare crow. Or gather scarecrows around you – good people not hungry birds. Put yourself in the right situation to receive the good news.

Shallow soil – how do we avoid being shallow soil? We try to let the word go deeper and deeper into your life. How do you do that? (answers)

Come to worship, pray, read the Bible. As with the birds – surround yourself with good people and good situations – get involved in church and help the roots to go deeper and deeper.

How about - Thorny ground – what’s happening there? You hear the word. You know about Jesus. You feel God’s love and receive God’s grace – but something starts choking it out. What is that? (answers)

What can choke out the good news? (answers)

 – negative people, poor choices, even good things that are out of balance – not spending enough time on our faith – letting other things distract you. Or if bad things happen in your life – not relying on God and trusting God to see you thru. And practically, here on earth – not relying on your church community. I have seen it a million times. When bad things happen in your life – a loss, or stress in a marriage, or some kind of failure, or illness or even just self doubt. When bad things happen – sometimes we pull away from the church just when we should go deeper. We get embarrassed that we’re not good enough or not perfect. We are afraid people will judge us or talk about us. So we pull away. We close off. We don’t share what is happening in our life – the deepest most important parts of our life. When someone says “How are you?” You say “Fine.” Even if you are not. And the weeds choke us out. The weeds pull us away from God. Instead, if we see the weeds coming – we should lean into God, and here on earth, lean into this community of faith. If you are going thru something and you need help, let us know. Let me know. Let someone here that you trust know. We might not be able to fix anything, but we can walk with you in the darkness, and we can cut away the thorns. We can try to help dig you out and keep those thorns from choking out faith, and hope, and love. Rely on one another. And if you see someone needing help, let us know – let me know. And of course, help them if you can. That’s what church is all about. That’s what God’s love is all about. Clearing the ground and creating fertile soil to grow.

Then that last part of the parable about producing a crop – what’s that all about? (answers) The magic of a parable is that the meanings change and grow. Remember I asked if we were the soil or the farmer. As we grow in fertile soil we become healthy and strong, and we produce good seeds for others. We become the farmer throwing out the soil for the next crop. This is the call to the church as a whole. We should throw out seeds – lots of seeds. We should throw the gospel – to reach people - tell people about God’s love in Jesus Christ our Lord. How? Any way we can. Here’s where the randomness of the farmer comes into play. The parable tells us don’t worry about whether a person is in the right place to receive God’s word – just offer it to them. Throw out seeds. Throw out lots of seeds. Love people as much as you can, in as many ways as you can. Love people as God loves people wherever they are. And God will help that love to grow.

So back to that question – how do we throw out seeds? How do we at First Presbyterian Church of Gardner tell people about God’s love in Jesus Christ? Give me specifics. (answers)

Worship. Sunday school. Small groups. Mission. Joy closet. Operation Christmas Child. Choir. Bells. Men’s group. Women’s groups. Offering our building. Food pantry. Feeding hungry. Smiling. Welcoming. Telling neighbors. Inviting others. Giving money. PCUSA offerings.

Starting a new worship service. Expanding our outreach. Reaching out to young adults.

The list goes on and on – or it should go on and on. The first parable for today starts with throwing out seeds. I said earlier that the farmer seemed too random. Now that I think about it, that too was intentional on Jesus’ part. Jesus says if we are to throw out the seeds of God’s love, if we are to grow and nurture the faith, if we are to have an abundant harvest, then we just throw out those seeds anywhere and everywhere. We throw out God’s love everywhere on random pathways, on rocky ground, on shallow thorny soil. We just keep throwing out love, because you just never know when that might turn into fertile ground. You just never know when that little tiny seed might take root and grow and be nurtured and flourish and blossom and produce abundant fruit. You just never know when that love you throw might become a beautiful, huge, fruitful tree where birds can come and nest, where others may gather and be protected. You just never know how your seed of God’s love might grow. So just keep throwing it out there and sharing the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.