

July 16, 2017 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Isaiah 55:10-13, Psalm 65:9-13  
Romans 8:1-11, Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

David Lose at DavidLose.net from 6-13-17 Enough! For Pentecost 6A. Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 1960.

**Grace, peace to you, beloved of God. Amen.**

**If I had my druthers, we'd be doing an "I wonder, I notice" sermon today.**

That's the one where I read the scripture slowly, very slowly and you interrupt me after a word or phrase using a sentence that begins I wonder... or I notice...

Like I said, if I had my druthers, we'd do that, but it doesn't work quite as well with parables, and our gospel today is indeed a parable—the parable of the sower and the seed.

Wondering and noticing, that structure, is best for action stories, Jesus calming the storm, or the friends lowering the man through the roof, trusting he will be healed by Jesus.

That said, promise me you won't turn off your creative juices, your imaginative engagement with this parable, and I promise an "I wonder, I notice" sermon sometime soon—interruptions and conversation and all.

**In the mean time, I notice two very different perspectives** in our gospel—grab you bulletin, check it out.

There's Jesus' first take: a sower went out to sow and as he freely scatters that seed, this is what happens: some falls here, some falls there, some thrives, lush and green, some shrivels in the hot sun.

Then, there is the second section, it picks up a few verses later: all explanation—did you sense the switch? Shorthand you might jot notes like "hearing and understanding = good soil" and so on.

You might even be a little giddy for Jesus' parables with their ordinary images are notoriously tricky, meant to disturb us, and finally, finally we get a little crib note (albeit heavy handed) that seems to lay it all out.

In the first it's about the sower, free, ridiculously generous, scattering seed here and there, trusting, hopeful.

In the second it's about the soil quality and the believer's heart, reminding me of that song in our worship book, "Lord, let my heart be good soil." It's really a prayer, isn't it? Lord, let my heart be good soil.

**Back in the 1960s a German New Testament Scholar** named Joachim Jeremias dug into the literary styles of many of Jesus' parables, this one included—and he changed the way we understand parables. Jeremias suspects that the parable itself, the first part, is original, the words, really, the promises, of Jesus. But he goes on: most likely the second part, the explanation, is added later when the gospel writer was trying to encourage a community struggling with its faith.

**Now, technically, I should pick one** or the other of these angles and preach that: the abundance of God the sower, OR the encouragement to us to be that good soil.

Instead, I'm going to live on the edge and lift up both. Mark my words, this is where it we went off the rails!

This is what happens when one comes back from 3½ weeks away in Ireland and Northern Ireland and

Scotland: We get a little risky, a little edgy, and we can't quite get our family sleeping in the right time zone, and, oh my: we can hear both the promises of God, and the encouragement for our souls.

And truth is, well-rested or not, we need them both, we need them both.

**During this time of vacation and continuing education, we spent a full week on the little island** (or they would say the wee island) called Iona, part of the Inner Hebrides, off the west coast of Scotland.

Go to Glasgow, then Oban, then take a ferry, then a bus across the Island of Mull, and finally another ferry.

Back in the year 563 St. Columba landed on those shores of Iona and began a monastery. 563.

Pilgrims came and went, so did the Vikings and so did history.

In the 1200s the Benedictines established a presence on that same site as Columba's first Celtic

monastery, beautiful land, green hills, sheep—lots of sheep, and the blue sea most always in sight.

Pilgrims came and went, pilgrims and more pilgrims, coming to the Abbey, to this holy place, to pray.

And then in the 1930s it became an ecumenical community focused on justice and hospitality, founded by an inner city Glasgow pastor named George MacLeod.

Still, now, today, there are pilgrims, like us, in that "Thin Space" where heaven and earth come close.

**One of the best** conversations I had that week was with a friend who spoke of feeling dry, spiritually dry.

We were literally on a day-long, off-road pilgrimage, walking spot to spot, stopping along the 7 mile route to learn some history, perhaps sing or read scripture, pray and reflect—it was a highlight of the week.

Tromping over boulder fields, through meadows, up and down crags, over spongy peat moss bogs, the soil quality was literally under our feet and this parable was in my ear.

We talked of the desire for meaningful work, and depth and joy of relationships,

what it feels like to go to church when it connects, and when it doesn't,

that yearning for community, spiritual community,

and the pull of prayer even as the pull of family and obligations seem overwhelming.

God, let my heart be good soil.

Isn't it interesting how living honestly, faithfully in drier times can create the environment to again be that good soil? Those conversations, and the ones that followed with others, were sustaining, recreating.

Grant us patience, God, to trust your seed, your soil, and our pilgrimage of faith, day by day.

That, dear friends, is the encouragement I hear in this scripture—a trust, a quiet hope, and a thin space.

**I also hear this persistent sower**, the sound of her feet moving in all kinds of soil, the quiet drop of seed skittering over rocks, coming to rest in a crevice, landing almost silently in the rich, dark earth. Seed is expensive, or maybe she's been collecting it from last year's bounty, either way it's valuable, hard-won, and instead of gripping it, possessively, frugally, she scatters it here and there. Is that trust that lets her scatter so freely? Is it hope? Is it reckless abandon? Is it pure divine wisdom? Is it love, great love that holds the seeds just long enough to touch them with grace and then scatter them afar? Trusting there is enough even when the world seems always, always to need more, want more?

**Enough, enough, enough. Enough for our God to share with patient mercy,**  
enough for us to practice God's ways, God's ridiculously generous ways.  
enough for this hungry and hurting world.

That, dear friends, is the promise I hear in this scripture—an overwhelmingly generous God who loves us and this world, and won't give up, nor run out. Again, sustaining, recreating.

A saving God who sees us as fertile ground, full of possibility, enough, even when we might think otherwise.

**This week, I invite you to take some time to wonder and notice in the spirit of this parable.**

**First:** Reconnect, notice how your soil is doing, what encouragement do you need?

Share that with someone you trust, and hear what they have to share.

**And then in these long summer days:** Tune yourself again to God's generous seeds of grace scattered in all the unexpected and surprising places of our life and world.

And wonder, wonder at the miracle of grace, and its bounty, active even in you.

**Enough. Enough. Thanks be to God, there is enough. Amen.**