

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

Grace to you and peace from God in Christ Jesus revealed in the mystery of seed and parable. Amen.

Any one who walks any distance with a young child knows what I'm talking about. As the "mature" adult you dismiss them as being: *So easily distracted*. But as the child you say, *Look at that! A pinecone! A butterfly wing! A flower growing through the crack of the sidewalk!*

This then is my task this morning as I see it, as your preacher, as your pastor for at least a few more weeks.

For you who wish (knowingly or unintentionally) to *dismiss* this parable as *simplistic*... the meaning of which is *beyond easy*... you who wish to pick up the pace in order to get along to other *more important* things (whether the rest of the service or Sunday brunch or a World Cup Soccer match)... My task, as I see it this morning, is to be the young child who tugs on your hand, the one who stops you in your tracks (you might be annoyed with me at times, that would be nothing new), but my task is to make you take a *closer look* at the full mystery of it all – *the very heart of the kingdom of God*, growing at your feet, through a crack in the sidewalk.

To me this is one way to hear the words of Jesus from our little sliver of Matthew's Gospel. Jesus (remember) has been walking with the disciples, leading them – Jesus has been the one out front for most of the last several chapters dragging along the disciples: *challenging religious authorities, curing and healing, afflicting the comfortable* (as we sometimes say) and *comforting the afflicted*.

But to me it seems there's a real shift this morning. It's easy to miss when you only hear this little sliver of Matthew's Gospel. But it's like Jesus switches from being the adult who is dragging the child-like disciples along, to all of a sudden (perhaps as one more way to shake things loose) – being the young child who tugs on the hand of the disciples (who surely were beginning to think of themselves as "mature" by this point) and Jesus seems to say, "slow down, take a look at something..."

“Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as [the sower] sowed, some seeds fell on the path... Other seeds fell on rocky ground... Other seeds fell among thorns... Other seeds fell on good soil...”

Now, I know that half of you have knees that won't bare this invitation literally – and the other half of us will hardly be able to bare this invitation metaphorically, but crouch down on your knees for a moment in order to take a closer look at this simple parable. Notice something, so simple, but so easily overlooked – *There are seeds, everywhere!*

Never mind what kind of an extravagant (dare we say overgenerous, excessive, wasteful, prodigal!) sower throws seed so casually, so callously! Never mind that the sower would most certainly fail as a modern-day farmer!

Just look closer... on your knees... Do you see? *There are seeds, everywhere, in all places!* On the path. On rocky ground. Among thorns. And on good soil. But do you *see?* 75% of the seeds are on places where you would least expect to find them, unless you look closely.

Robert Capon (the author of the book, *The Parables of the Kingdom* – a book which I'll confess, I take off my shelf just about every time a parable shows up in the readings)... Robert Capon talks about this parable as *the great watershed of all Jesus' parables*<sup>1</sup>. It's like the key that opens up the mystery of all the rest. The “Decoder Ring,” if you will. The “Rosetta Stone” of the parables. He says that this parable points the way to all the other parables to reveal the “mysteries” of the *kingdom of God*. And he says the first thing, *the first mystery revealed* by this parable – is that the kingdom of God is *catholic*.<sup>2</sup>

Now before you all rush to transfer your membership to St. John the Baptist Catholic Church (which don't get me wrong, I have deep respect for and our congregation has a wonderful relationship with them), but take a closer look at the word “catholic.” You've probably heard this before (and here I'm speaking “as a Lutheran”), but we often speak of *Catholic* with a capitol “C” (like St. John the Baptist *Catholic* Church down the road), but we also speak of *catholic* with a lower-case “C.” The lower-case *catholic* is just a simple, albeit ancient word, that means *universal*. It comes from two words in Greek that together mean “according to the whole thing.”

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Farrar Capon, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (Zondervan, 1985), p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Capon, p. 73.

Now, you can disagree with me about this (and many of our Christian brothers and sisters who worship today around this little world of ours certainly will). You can dismiss me like I too often dismiss my own children when we're on a walk, "C'mon! Let's keep going! Yes, I see the butterfly wing!" Or "Yes, I see the pinecone!" Or "Yes, I see the little flower growing in the crack of the sidewalk! But c'mon! *We've got more important things to do! ... C'mon! I've got better things to do...*" is what I am actually saying.

You can disagree with me or dismiss me on the *universal* (the *catholic* nature of God's Word, of God's church, of God's grace and forgiveness and love); but here's the invitation. Just crouch down for a moment and look closer at this parable and then see if you don't stand in awe as you're crouching there (and let me know how you manage to do that, by the way – how you "stand" in awe as you "crouch" there, anyway...) – just look closer at the words of Jesus as he says that God's Word is like seed and the seed – brothers and sisters of Christ – *is everywhere: on the path, on rocky ground, among thorns and on good soil, but 75% of the time in places where you would least expect!* And then tell me if this God we worship is not pleased to dwell (sometimes in hidden, mysterious ways) but present *universally* in every crack and crevice of this world of ours.

Because right there "*on the path*" God is pleased to dwell, in marketplaces and economies across this world, where you know God is just going to be trampled by the feet of those who barely notice God's word of challenge, let alone *appreciate* God's word of comfort. But there it is – the very presence of God's Word (God's church, God's grace and forgiveness and love) in Christ Jesus sitting *in the middle of the path*.

And there it is "*on rocky ground*," in the middle of conflicts and wars and the ugliest of places marred by violence and destruction – places where things like beauty (you would think) would wither immediately. What use would a sower have with planting seed there? But there it is – the very presence of God's Word (God's church, God's grace and forgiveness and love) in Christ Jesus *on rocky ground*.

And there it is "*among thorns*," in the pain, in the suffering, with the doctor delivering the news, with the funeral director sitting down with you – in places where your checkbook won't buy you even a seedling of hope. But there it is – the very presence of God's Word (God's church, God's grace and forgiveness and love) in Christ Jesus *among thorny places*.

*Let anyone with ears to listen, hear!* Because there it is – the very presence of God’s Word (God’s church, God’s grace and forgiveness and love) in Christ Jesus *on good soil, bringing forth grain, some a hundredfold, others sixty and others thirty.* And even here in the one place in four that you would expect to find seeds, there is still this *impossibility.*

Because the Jewish peasant, the *campasino* famers gathered around listening to Jesus; they would be thrilled with four, at most five times the yield in their own fields.<sup>3</sup> And I can just seem them dismiss Jesus with a laugh, “*A hundredfold? Hah! Even sixty or thirty? Hah... and hah! What kind of a farmer does this Jesus think he is?!*”

The kind, apparently, who was there when the universe was just the size of a seed. The kind who shows up, apparently, in places and in ways that you would least expect to find a single seed of hope.

“Oh, look closely,” Jesus seems to say, “and *God will surprise you with what you might find hidden in the crack of the sidewalk, among the rocks, in the thorny places!* Let alone in those places where you *do* expect to find God’s kingdom. Oh, look widely there too and *God will surprise you with the abundance!* If you see only four, or at most five times the yield, maybe you need to take a wider look, change the scope of your perspective, catch just a glimpse of the *universal* way that God sees – where hope can be proclaimed with hundredfold abundance.

Any one who walks any where with a young child knows what I’m talking about. You may dismiss them as *so easily distracted.* But look closer and you will find God crouching with you like a child over every *pinecone, on every butterfly wing, and with every flower growing through the crack of a sidewalk!*

Thanks be to God for the good news that causes us to stand in awe, even as we crouch down on our knees like children wrapped in the universal, mystery of it all. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce J. Malina & Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Augsburg Fortress, 2003), p. 74.