

10 July 2011
Pentecost 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Not Foolish, but Gracious”

Text: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (Isaiah 55:10-13; Romans 8:12-17)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

A sower went out to sow his seed. And he throws it all over the place. Almost like he was blindfolded. He doesn't seem to know what he is doing, or where he is sowing. He haphazardly and recklessly throws his precious seed this way and that, in the hope that some may grow.

How foolish, we think. How foolish to we who like to plant our seeds much more scientifically and precisely. Not this man. He walks over hill and over dale, from here to kingdom come, scattering seed here and there. He sows upon asphalt and sand, among weeds and thorns, where the soil is thick and thin, rich and poor. It matters not to him. He gives no thought to where the seed may land, sowing in weak, foolish, and impossible places. He sows where wheat does not, will not, should not, and cannot grow. Where some will be snatched and some will be scorched and some will be choked and some matted flat.

It is baffling to us. It makes no sense. He doesn't seem to care about wasting his good seed. That some will grow seems enough. And so he sows and sows and sows.

This seed, Jesus says, is the Word of God. And how far and wide our Lord scatters His Word, that some may grow. He sows His seed which grows in Abel but is choked in Cain. He sows His seed at the time of Noah, but only in eight is it not snatched away. He sows His seed in Sodom, where the thorns of sin choke all but four, while later in unlikely Nineveh, over 120,000 take root. He sows His seed in Israel, and for every Moses and Joshua, Caleb and Rahab where the seed bears fruit, there are those whose hearts are as soft as concrete, who instead grumbl and complain and bow down to the golden calf and the Baals and Ashteroth.

He sows His seed in Jerusalem, in Herod's palace, where wise men rejoice while the king plots murder. He sows His seed in Galilee and Judea, where Pharisees trample it and prostitutes and tax collectors become disciples. And still He sows, throughout the ages. He does not stop. How generous He is. Though some is snatched and some is scorched and some is choked and some is trampled, He does

not stop. He cannot stop. His Word goes forth, that it may grow and produce. And so He sows and sows and sows. Everywhere. All over the place.

And because He does, His seed, His Word, has been sown into *your* heart as well. So what will happen to it there? Will it take root in you? And if it has, will it remain? Though we like to think our hearts are good soil, or at least better than most of the hard-core, hard-pan, weedy, thorny, rocky hearts of the “real sinners” out there, is that the truth?

How is it with the Word of God in your heart? Oh, I know that you want it to remain and grow . . . or do you? A part of you does, yes, that new man, which loves God’s Word and truth. Yet that old man in you has big feet to stomp it out, in fear of what it will mean for your life. You want to do good . . . as long as it is convenient. You want to resist temptation . . . as long as it is something you really don’t enjoy anyway. You want to love others . . . as long as they’re easy to get along with and don’t demand too much. You want to be generous . . . as long as it doesn’t really cost you anything, or cut into your free time, or make you go out of your way. For every good desire there’s a thorn, a weed, a rock, a sun, a big foot of the old man ready to snatch or scorch or choke or trample it.

So what do you do? Pull the weeds? Good luck with that! If you have a garden in your yard, then you know - they *always* grow back. So what do you do? Dig up all the rocks? Maybe some sins are easy for you to dig up and cast away, but the original sin that you are born with is the bedrock you cannot remove. Shall you chase all the hungry satanic birds away? If only we could.

And so it is.

Yet still the sower sows. Do you see what good news this is now? What at first seemed like foolishness is in the end good news for us. He sows and sows and sows, and some is sown on good soil. Yes, and grows, producing a hundred, or sixty, or thirty fold. ***The Word of God does not return empty.***

For the Word of God, this seed, is not mere information or instruction. The bible is not **Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth**, or a text book for living right. It is much, much more than that. For the Word that is sown is the Seed that had been promised to Eve. It is the Seed that had been promised to Abraham. It is the Seed that had been promised to David. It was the Seed sown into the womb of the virgin Mary through the Word of the angel Gabriel, when the Son of God was made man. When the Son of God Himself came into this weedy, rocky, thorn-infested world of sin and became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and dwelt among us. Yes, the Seed that is sown and sown and sown, that is so generously given to you and me, is Christ himself.

Truly, He is the Word which came down from heaven and did *not* return empty, but accomplished *all* for which He was sent - returning to the Father *even more* than a hundred-fold: atoning for the sin of the world. He had no hardness or weeds or thorns in head or heart, but was perfect in every way. And just as a seed must die before producing its fruit, so God's incarnate Word, Jesus Christ our Lord, died your death on the cross, that from His death and burial would sprout and grow eternal life. For He died for your transgressions and was raised for your justification.

And so it is! By grace through faith in Christ, you are raised, you are justified, you are sanctified.

And so now this Seed is sown in you to be enfolded in you; to grow in you and you in Him. And from the water and the blood that flowed from His side on the cross, you receive the water and food and drink of forgiveness that you need to grow and bear fruit. His triumph over sin will triumph also in you. For although we are not able, against Christ there is no weed too strong, no thorn too sharp, no rock too hard, and no sun too hot. In Christ, the curse of sin is reversed and we are enabled to live as sons of God crying, "**Abba! Father!**" And so Christ takes our hearts where faith and love does not, will not, should not, and cannot grow, and transforms them into fruitful gardens, producing thirty, sixty, or a hundred-fold in love and good works.

He who has ears, let him hear, Christ says. He is speaking not of ears made of cartilage and skin, but ears opened and created by the Spirit of God. Ears of faith that hear not mere words and not a man's words, but hear Christ. Ears that hear Christ say: *I baptize you*. Ears that hear Christ say: *I forgive you all your sins*. Ears that hear Christ say: *This is My Body, This is My Blood*. Ears that hear Christ speaking words that are Spirit and life. And faith born of this Seed dies and rises with Christ to a new life. A new life led by the Spirit and no longer the flesh.

For through this Word and Spirit, Christ strengthens the new man and drowns the old man in you, the clouds of repentance block the scorching sun of your sinful impulses, the satanic vulture is driven away from you, and the harmful thorns of your sinful desires become the healthful mulch of holy desires. For through this Word and Spirit, Christ works in you and lives in you.

That's why the Sower continues to sow His Seed, not scientifically and precisely and because you're such good candidates, but sows and sows and sowsa, scattering it generously and constantly - not foolishly, but graciously - that some may grow, and the miracle of faith and growth continue. For still today, the Word comes down from heaven and is accomplishing in you that for which the Father sends it - giving ears to the deaf, sight to the blind, life to the dead, exalting the humble, and

forgiving your sin, that you, too, may have eternal life. Yes, the Sower continues to sow *Himself* into your heart, that you grow into His image and likeness and bear much fruit.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

(Thanks to Rev. Jason Braaten, for many great insights on the text that I incorporated into this sermon.)