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Pentecost 7

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Abundant and Joyful Sowers”

Text: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23; Isaiah 55:10-13

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

Last week I told you about the blueberry plants we have growing in our yard. If you weren't able to make it to church last week, you'll have to go listen to that sermon - either in the recording of our livestream on our YouTube channel, or on our church website or blog.

This week I want to tell you about another plant in our yard, but this one, one that we did not plant. It just grew by itself. A tomato plant in our front yard. Now, we do plant tomato plants - in the gardens in our backyard. So we were surprised to find this one growing where it was. We think that either a squirrel or a chipmunk picked a tomato off one of the plants we planted in the backyard ('cuz they do that!), carried it around front, and after eating what they wanted, left the rest on the ground. And there it stayed - through the Fall and Winter and into the Spring - and then all by itself, it started to grow. And that plant we did not plant, I think produced more tomatoes for us than the ones we did! The seed just grew, and produced an abundant harvest.

The parable Jesus told today was about sowing seeds like that. Seeds that are sown that produce an abundant harvest. But this is not a lesson in agriculture. Obviously, the sower in this parable, who is throwing seed all over the place, abundantly, recklessly, carelessly, isn't doing this in the most effective or precise way. He's just throwing it out and letting the seed do the rest.

Now I imagine the farmers who hear this parable have a hard time with it! For them, seed is expensive and valuable. They spend a lot of time selecting the right seed for their conditions, and try not to waste any of it. They try to maximize their return on investment. Like we do with the tomatoes we plant in our backyard. But the sower in the parable doesn't seem to care about that. He's just throwin' it out - in the field, on the rock, on the path . . . sowing his seed! Sowing.

Maybe because he just wants to get the task over with. He doesn't really want to be there, doesn't really want to be doing that, so get it done as fast as he can. We all do that. And then he can go back and tell his master that he did his job. Maybe not the best he could have, but he did it.

But there's another way to look at this as well . . . *Maybe* the sower is filled with joy! He loves being out there in his field, and, looking forward to the harvest this seed will produce, he just starts throwing it out. He's happy to be doing so, even though he knows some will not produce. Some will be **snatched**, and some will be **scorched**, and some will be **choked**. But some will produce a harvest, too. And that gives him joy.

I think this is something to think about because one thing that we *didn't* hear today - that was contained in the chunk of verses that were omitted in the Gospel we heard - is that Jesus explains this parable *only* to His disciples. The great crowds that gathered about Him by the Sea of Galilee all heard the parable, but only to his disciples did Jesus unpack its meaning. **Because they were the ones He was going to send out to be sowers. They were the ones who were going to be scattering the seed of His Word, and Jesus wanted them to be **joyful**, He wanted them to be **abundant**, and He wanted them to be **realistic**.**

Jesus wanted the disciples to know that there would be a harvest. That the words of the prophet Isaiah that we heard today would be fulfilled. That

*as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

So they should be **joyful** in their work, knowing that their labor would not be in vain. And they should also be **abundant** - don't be stingy with the seed, but sow it everywhere! They have an unlimited supply. So throw it out joyfully! And also realize that while there will be a harvest, some will also not produce. Some will be **snatched**, some will be **scorched**, and some will be **choked**. For we live in a sinful and difficult world. A hard and stony world. A world where the evil one is lurking and seeking to snatch the seed whenever and however he can.

So don't sow the seed of God's Word according to some scientific method. So it joyfully, sow it abundantly, and realize that it may produce a harvest in places you don't expect . . . like a rogue tomato plant in my front yard. God's Word will accomplish the purpose for which God sent it.

But this teaching to the disciples should also be applied to us. In this way . . . I think most of us, when we hear this parable, think about it *scientifically*. We try to figure out what kind of soil we are and how we can make ourselves better soil. How can I keep the weeds

out of my life? How can I make my heart a little less rocky? How can I keep satan away? And we try to do those things. And we're sincere and maybe you try really hard. *And it doesn't work, right?*

Because like those persistent birds I talked about last week, who keep coming back and stealing my blueberries, satan doesn't give up, but keeps coming back. He doesn't care how hard you try! He'll match your effort and raise you! And he doesn't need sleep or rest, and he doesn't take a break. He's not going to leave you alone. And no matter how hard you try not to worry, **you do**. No matter how hard you try to not let the ridicule or persecution of the world get to you, **it does**. No matter how many hard rocks you try to remove from your heart and life, **there's always more**. And note that Jesus was telling this parable in one of the most rocky places on planet earth - *they knew* you couldn't get rid of all the rocks!

The point of this parable - for the disciples then, and for you and me today - is that despite all this, despite all this **still there is a harvest!** Still there are seeds that are not snatched, are not scorched, and are not choked, and which grow and produce a harvest. In you and your life. In your heart. And that's not you - that's the power of the seed, the power of the Word of God, and the Spirit working through that Word. Despite the devil, the world, and your own sinful nature, God is miraculously growing His Word in you. And producing a harvest - 30, 60, or a hundredfold.

Now, it's not wrong to try harder to hear the Word and keep the weeds of worry and the heat of persecution and the temptations of the devil from preventing its growth. That's good, in fact. But the point of this parable is not what you do or can accomplish, but what the Word does and accomplishes in you. The *miraculous* work of Jesus and His Spirit in you.

And so His Word is joyfully and abundantly sown **here** - in the Divine Service, in Bible Study, in Catechesis, and in your homes in your own reading and studying and discussion. It is poured on you in **Baptism**, it is sown into your ears and through your eyes, it is fed into your mouths in the **Supper**. And while sometimes the devil is right there to snatch it away, and sometimes the cares of life choke it, and sometimes the troubles you are going through scorch it, it also lands on good soil. For you're not one soil or the other or the other - *you're all of the above*.

But despite everything in the world and everything in your life, *here you are*. Which means the Word has done its work and brought you here. The Word is doing its work and working in you. And as you leave this place the Word is producing a harvest of good fruit in your life as you do those things God has given you to do. Good works in your vocations as a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker. Caring, serving, helping, teaching, comforting, and joyfully sowing the Word yourself as you speak to others. And God's Word works . . . maybe even in places you didn't expect. And maybe

that seed sits dormant for a while, for a season or two, and then grows at a time you didn't expect. That's on God. It's His Seed. For the disciples, and for you and I, the instruction is just to sow it abundantly and joyfully.

And it will accomplish that for which God sends it. We know because the Seed is God's Word, and God's Word was made flesh, and that Word made flesh was once crucified, died, and planted in a tomb of pure rock where nothing can grow. **And yet grow it did.** On the third day rising from the dead and producing a harvest of souls that, as we hear in the book of Revelation (7:9), is *a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages*. That's what this Word can do, and will do.

So if you've been sitting here today only half-heartedly listening to the Word, thinking about other things, worrying about stuff, being distracted, **repent**. If you haven't been spending time in the Word during the week, or not trying to live according to the Word, **repent** of that, too. If the troubles of life have been burning you up, return to your Baptism and let those waters of grace and forgiveness quench those flames. Jesus' forgiveness is here for you, always. And that forgiveness that you then hear, that is spoken to you, is the Seed of the Word as well, sown into your ears and heart, to grow in your life. To give you faith and joy. To produce a harvest in your life.

So if you don't see that harvest, *what do you do?* Get more Seed! More Word. More Jesus! Go to the Word. Come be forgiven, come be fed, come and have God's Word thrown into you. And **rejoice** that you have a God and Saviour who so generously, abundantly, lavishly, freely, graciously, and joyfully sows His Seed. For you. And for the life of the world.

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.