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Pentecost 6

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“A Lavish (Foolish?) Sower”

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.

The neighbor behind our house has nice flower gardens, full of color. We were envious. Because at our house, we plant flowers like that and the deer come and eat them - usually the night right after we plant them! So we asked her how she did it. How she kept the deer from eating her flowers like they eat ours. She said she didn't - she just planted more than they could eat!

It's kind of the same with our tomato plants. We not only try to plant flowers, but vegetables, too. We can keep the deer away from them with a fence, but not the squirrels and chipmunks. So invariably, every year, just as the tomatoes are turning red and ripe and ready for picking, one of those little varmints comes and picks them, takes one or two bites, and then leaves the rest on the ground. Maybe they think they're sharing, or it's their way of thanking us . . . or mocking us. So now, instead of planting tomato plants that produce fewer but bigger tomatoes, we plant the ones that produce more but smaller fruit - so there is enough for the critters and us.

The parable we heard today is kind of like those stories. The man in the parable sows enough seed to get a harvest - because he knows that not all his seed is going to produce. He knows the **critters** are going to get some, the **weeds** are going to choke some, and the **sun** is going to scorch some. But there will also be some that grows and produces for him. So he is not stingy with his seed. He sows abundantly, generously - perhaps foolishly so - in order to get a harvest.

It's a simple story, really. But as often with parables, sometimes the point is still missed. Jesus Himself calls it the Parable *of the Sower*. That is, a parable to teach us something *about the Sower*. But some call it the Parable *of the Soils* - putting the emphasis not on the sower or on his seed, but on the soil, and therefore giving the impression that the point of the parable is to make better soil so that the seed will grow. Others think the point is *better sowing of the seed* - that we should be more targeted, more selective, more careful. Don't waste seed.

But both of those interpretations of this parable put the onus on us - for you to improve the soil of your heart, or for the church to improve the techniques she uses to sow the Word in the world. Both have the same focus: How can I improve myself, or how can we get others

ready, to hear the Word and grow?

Now, certainly, there is a kernel of truth in those things. For example, we can get a good night's sleep before church so we are ready to hear the Word of God. We can set aside time and turn off our cell phones and other distractions at home to read the Word and pray. And we *should* do those things. There will also be times when our friends, family, and neighbors are ready to hear the Word and times when they might be more resistant. All of that's true . . . *but not the point of this parable*. Because you will never do enough - *can* never do enough - to make the Word of God grow. There are too many things out of your control. Too many enemies of the Word.

Like the **first enemy** Jesus mentions - the **birds** that come and snatch away the seed that fell on the hard path. That's the evil one. Always ready to swoop in and take advantage of those hard places in our hearts. Those places where maybe worldly opinion and thinking has hardened us to the truth of God's Word. Worldly opinion regarding morality, what is really right and wrong; or science, whether all that the Scriptures say is true or not; or who is saved and how, if Jesus really is the one and only way. Or maybe where sin has hardened our hearts, making us resistant to repent and ask forgiveness for ourselves, and resistant in our willingness to forgive others. Resistant to those sins we really don't want to stop, but hard and stubborn toward others in those same sins. Resistant to change our minds, our attitudes, our actions. Hard places in your hearts - you got 'em. What are they, where are they, how big are they, for you?

Then there's **the second enemy** Jesus mentions - the **sun** which scorches the seeds that quickly pop up in the rocky ground. No roots leave the new and tender plants susceptible to the intensity of the sun - as you are to the intensity of tribulation or persecution. When your joy in God's Word and truth is slammed by opposition in the world, and either you agree with them and go along with them - or at least shut up and don't say anything against them! - or you pay the price. You will lose a boyfriend or girlfriend, a promotion at work, maybe even a job. You'll be mocked, won't be invited to certain events. Say the words, bend the knee, toe the party line, or face the world's graffiti of shame on you and their rage against you. Yes, there are places in your hearts where your faith is on rocky ground - you got 'em. What are they, where are they, how big are they, for you?

And then there are the seeds that fall victim to **the third enemy**, the **thorns**, the choking weeds of the world. *The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches*, Jesus calls them. What are the cares and concerns filling your hearts and choking out the Word of God planted there? The wonderful promises of God that get swallowed up by . . . what? Health concerns, family problems, job worries, Covid fear, uncertainty about the future, anxiety about your kids. And your riches, too - and not just money. But whatever you're wealthy in, or *want* to be wealthy in, and it's taking over your life as you serve it and go after it, and the Word of God is suffocated in those weeds. You got 'em, weeds, in your hearts. Maybe many, and many different kinds. What are they, how many are they for you?

So if the point of this parable was for you to make sure the soil of your heart was good and ready to grow God's Word and produce an abundant harvest . . . *really? You're going to do that?* You're going to be able to keep the evil one away and soften up the hard places in your hearts? You're going to be able to remove all the rocks and rocky places from your hearts and withstand all the heat of the world? You're going to pull all the weeds out of your hearts, and not let cares and concerns and worries and anxieties have any place there? *Really?*

Truth is, the human heart, by nature, by birth, because of sin, **is a terribly hostile place for the Word of God.**

**And yet** . . . some of that seed does grow and produce a harvest. Because the sower is abundant and generous with His seed - perhaps foolishly so - and so despite all the junk that is in your heart and life, and keeps coming into your heart and life, it grows. *Miraculously*, it would be accurate to say. Maybe we're spoiled, maybe we're just used to it, but when that Word of God is sown, and we respond: *Thanks be to God!* - we should mean that! Thanks be to God that He does not just sow a little of His Word, but a lot. And keeps doing so. That some of it will grow in our hearts and bear fruit in our lives.

And then as His Word grows in us, *it* can change our hearts. The Word can do what we are unable to do. The key to getting a nice thick lawn, I am told, is not to kill the weeds but to strengthen and thicken the good grass. Then the good chokes out the bad. And the key to sun and drought resistance is not shade, but good and deep roots. And so as the Word of God grows in you, your faith is strengthened and deepened, and the critters and the weeds and the sun . . . they're not going away, but their job becomes much harder, and the fruits increase in your life. *Thanks be to God!*

**And even one seed of God's Word is able to do this.** God is extremely rich and generous with His Word, but it only takes one seed to start growing . . . one seed planted in the heart . . . one seed planted in the world . . . one seed planted in . . . *Bethlehem*. As soon as that seed was planted, as soon as that seed was born, as soon as that seed grew and stepped out into the world, the critters, sun, and weeds came, trying to snatch it away, trying to burn it up, trying to choke it out. No sooner had Jesus heard the words from heaven in His baptism, *You are my beloved Son*, that satan was there in the wilderness trying to snatch that Word away: *Yeah, right! If you are the Son of God* . . . No sooner had Jesus begun to preach the Word that the heat was turned up against Him by the Pharisees and Jewish authorities. They tried to choke Him with accusations of sin and mocking taunts while hanging on the cross. And when Jesus bowed His head and died, it looked as if they were successful in stamping out that seed God sowed in this world. And then it was planted in the ground in a hard, dry, place of solid rock where no seed could ever grow . . .

Except it did! **It grew.** And it hasn't stopped growing. The Word is poured, the Word is read, the Word is spoken, the Word is fed, the Word is thrown out into the world, into you, falling into all sorts of hearts and all kinds of soils. *And growing.* Isaiah said it in his

prophecy that we heard today: The Word of God *shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it*. That is, the Word of God made flesh *will* succeed - He will accomplish the salvation of the world on the cross. He will not be defeated. He will atone for your sins and the sin of the world. He will win the forgiveness of your sins. He will defeat death and the grave - life will come from the dead. He will do it.

But so, too, will the Word that God **sends now** - the Word that *proclaims and gives* the Word made flesh. It, too, will grow and succeed. It will produce joy and peace. *Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle*. Good plants. And the harvest will not only be *in your life*, but will be you yourself. That you will be among the harvest on the Last Day and brought into the kingdom.

This is *the Parable of the Sower*; about Him. So if this parable doesn't make you say *Thanks be to God!* you're not hearing it right. This is a joyous Word, this parable, of God's abundant and lavish love in the generous and abundant sowing of His seed. His seed and Word to work in our hearts, to soften the hard and stony places, to pull the weeds of sin, and to deepen the roots of faith. His Spirit, working through that Word, doing what we are unable to do. His Spirit working in us, so that as Paul said to us today, we can *cry "Abba! Father!"* as children of God. Rejoicing in the Baptism and **the Word** that was poured on us there which made us His children. Rejoicing in being able to come to our Father in repentance with the promise not of punishment or chastisement, but to hear **His Word** of forgiveness and have **that Word** again sown in our hearts. And rejoicing in the family dinner, to receive the Body and Blood, the forgiveness and life, of **the Word of God made flesh**. Miracle upon miracle upon miracle. Word upon Word upon Word. For you, for you, for you.

A sower sows His seed, lavishly, abundantly, generously - but, it turns out, not foolishly. For it does exactly what He sows it for - it grows children of God. And maybe His Word you will speak to others as well. All it takes is one seed to fall into that good soil . . .

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.