



Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Trinity 6, July 12, 2026

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That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. ⁴

And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, ⁶ but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear." ... "Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³ As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

When I was pastor in St. Louis, I conducted a regular worship service just down the road at Garden View Memory Care. There were no members of Faith Lutheran Church at that facility, but our congregation *had* hosted services there in the past, and they had included in my call letter that they wanted me to start those services back up, so that's what I did. I walked into Garden View, I spoke with the Activities Coordinator there in the lobby, and I got worship services scheduled for every Thursday of each month, minus each second Thursday when the Catholic Mass was scheduled.

And the first Thursday that I preached at Garden View, I finally made it past the lobby for the first time, and I saw some of the residents. And no doubt about it, this was *a memory care facility*. I went into the dining room that they had arranged as a temporary chapel; a number of residents were already there, seated in their wheelchairs which were pointed towards the podium. I started handing out large-print bulletins; most of the residents didn't even seem to notice me. The residents that did take a bulletin—half of those bulletins ended up on the floor before the service even began. Quite a few people were sleeping, some were yelling sporadically, some were playing with dolls. There was drool, there were crumbs, there were noises, and there were smells. There were *smells*.

And before beginning that first service, I introduced myself. I didn't get any response. I explained what I was doing there. I didn't get any response. I started to *wonder* what I was doing there. We began with a hymn. No one joined. I read a few Scripture readings, gave a devotion. I wasn't sure anyone was *listening*. There *were* a few workers present to listen; one stood up and wheeled out a resident. One pulled out her phone and started scrolling. One stepped out for a cigarette. What *was* I doing there?

Over the weeks that followed, I started to feel that my 10:15-10:45 AM timeslot three or four Thursdays a month was *sort of* a waste of time. I *kept* going because that was the soil my congregation

had called me to sow the Word of God into, and they were overjoyed that I was doing so. But I would be *lying* if I said that I thought that Garden View Memory Care was *fertile* soil. I'd be lying if I said that I thought those services were *worth* half an hour of my time and the twenty cents in gasoline it cost me to get there. *Where* was the good dirt? Because I didn't think it was there (not at first, anyway).

And Jesus tells us a parable today that I definitely should have thought about more closely those Thursdays at Garden View. It's a pretty straightforward parable; we've all heard it many times. And in this parable, Jesus states the horticultural obvious. A sower goes out and sows seed. He sows it *everywhere*. And the results are predictable—anyone can tell you—the seed takes root exactly where you would expect it to, and it does *not* take root exactly where you *would not* expect it to.

And so, we have to ask *why* this sower is so ignorant. If this is his job, why are we so much better at it than he? Why is he wasting perfectly good seed? Why is he casting it on a walking path, among thorns, in rocky soil? It's *never going to work* there!

And we know this parable isn't about seeds, or plants, or farming, since we have, after all, already read Jesus' explanation. This is about souls and sharing the Word of God, sowing the Word of the Kingdom. Sharing that Word *everywhere* and to *all types*. And even though we agree with *that* a bit more on principle, we still generally believe that sharing the Word of God *everywhere* is a waste of time. We would rather just find the *good* soil, and plant the Word there, because that's where the results will come. So, let's go out find the *good* dirt, where is the *good* dirt?

Where *is* the good dirt? That's a question we answer every single day, usually in the negative. Because every single day, we have opportunities to do what this sower is doing—share the Word of God *everywhere*. But we don't do that! Because we seem to know *exactly* where the good dirt is *not*.

- For instance, we seem to think that the way a person votes is a determining factor in whether or not they are “good dirt.”
- We *easily* scope out the confirmand who is going through the motions and simply paying his dues. He makes his vows, but we *know* we'll never see *him* darkening the sanctuary door again. “Good dirt”? More like goodbye.
- We know the families in our towns that have *never* shown any interest in attending church, and we're certain that none of those apples will ever fall very far from the tree.
- “Good dirt” does not describe those who have a checkered past, who are promiscuous, or drug users, or people who can be found every night slouched over at the local bar—none of that makes for “good dirt,” right?

We seem to know *exactly* where “good dirt” is not. And that's *exactly* the problem: we know where *not* to go to find good dirt, or at least we *think* we do. Or maybe the problem is that we actually go out *looking* specifically for the *good* dirt—and *only* for the good dirt—as if the difference between “good dirt” and “bad dirt” is something that *we* can spot. And that is just not the way things work in God's Kingdom.

That's what this parable is about, the way things work in God's Kingdom. In fact, that's what *all* of Matthew chapter 13 is about: the way things work in God's Kingdom. In this chapter, Jesus tells a

series of seven parables—sower and the seed, wheat and the tares, the mustard seed, the leaven, the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, and the dragnet. And throughout this entire chapter, there's this overarching verb that's woven in and through these parables in various ways, tying them all together. It's the Greek verb, "basileuon"—which means, in English, "to reign, to rule, to be and act like a king." Like *the King*. All of these parables are about this one question: what is it like when Jesus is King—when Jesus rules as King? How do things work when Jesus reigns as King?

And when you take all of these parables together, the answer is obvious—with *Jesus* reigning as King, He does not do things in a way that you would think is normal or expected.

- A sower is wasteful, inefficient, even foolish because he flings expensive seed everywhere, and most of it, predictably, never bears fruit.
- Weeds are allowed to grow up together with the wheat, they're not to be weeded out until the harvest.
- Jesus' kingdom is tiny, insignificant, overlooked by the world—like a tiny mustard seed, or like a little bit of yeast in a large lump of dough.
- A man loses his bearings when he finds a beautiful pearl—he sells *everything* he has, and he buys *only* this one pearl—not a diversified portfolio at all.

That's what the Kingdom of God is like. All of that. Clearly, the reign of God is not normal. So, we need to stop treating it like a normal thing, such as being able to tell the difference between soil that's good for planting and soil that's bad for planting. The reign of God is not something that you just go out looking for on your own terms when it's convenient for you. No, it's something that happens in the most unexpected places, even in places that you would never imagine.

I had thought that Garden View Memory Care was bad soil, a waste of my time. Until that time when a family came out from an adjacent room to meet me in the hallway after the service. They were there meeting together to plan out a funeral for their loved one who was dying. And when they heard me start singing all alone in that room full of people on the other side of the wall, apparently they stopped talking. And they remained in silence all the way until I gave the closing benediction and sang the doxology. Then they came out to meet me and thank me, because they said they needed to receive what I had been there sowing that day.

Or the little old lady that always sat in the back, as far away from me as possible. Evelyn. She never said a word to me, never took a bulletin. And one Thursday she wasn't there, and I asked the workers where she was, and they said she had died. She was 102 years old, she had been on hospice care, dying of cancer. She never left her room, except for three or four Thursdays a month when the Lutheran worship service was being held; those mornings she demanded to be taken to the chapel.

Or Corky, the gentleman that always sat at the front table, playing with little toys, never looking me in the eye. His wife would come visit him and sit with him at that table for the service each week. And she wrote me a letter thanking me for what had become Corky's favorite time of the week, 10:15-10:45 AM on a Thursday, when He got to sit next to His wife and hear the Words of His Savior.

When I look back on all of that, I feel humiliated. Because I realize that I was trying to tame the Word

of God in that place. I was underestimating it. I imagined that I could see the things that only God can see. I imagined that I knew the difference between good dirt and bad dirt. And how wrong I was. And yet, even so, God gave me the privilege of watching that seed take root. I caught a glimpse of the reign of God those days, bursting forth like a golden field of wheat in a room filled with strange sounds and strange smells.

That's how Jesus reigns. That's how His Word works. The Word of God ushers in God's reign in some of the most unexpected places. So, the sower sows the seed everywhere. Because Jesus didn't come proclaiming God's reign only to those who wanted to hear it. No, He came and *everywhere* He went, He was ushering in the reign of God. And so, His Kingdom comes when he sits in front of the crowds and says, **"Blessed are the poor."** (Matthew 5:3) It comes when He extends His hand to that outcast leper and says, **"I [am willing]; be clean."** (Matthew 8:3) It comes when He says of a *dead little girl*, **"[She] is not dead but sleeping."** (Matthew 9:24)

God's reign comes in the most *unexpected* places—even among those who would nail Him to a cross. And in His death and resurrection, He yields a harvest that wins salvation for *all* of creation—even for those that we might dismiss, even for those that we might overlook, even for you, and even for me.

That seed of salvation was sown into your heart and your mind, and it was watered in a baptismal flood—a cleansing word for your dirty heart because Christ cared to the point of death.

And *now*, as people who have been brought into that reign, Christ calls you to go and sow that Word, just like the sower does. Not concerned about where it falls, not looking for the good dirt while avoiding the bad. No, you go and sow the Word of God relentlessly and everywhere, without one thought about the possible results. Just sow the seed. That's how Christ brought *you* into His harvest. Because someone sowed the seed in a place that was unlikely to bear fruit.

May God help *you* to do the same, because the seed which you sow is a cleansing, powerful Word that ushers in the reign of God in the most unexpected places. God, help us to do so, in Jesus' name. Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.