

"Sow What?" A Sermon based on Isaiah 55:10-13; Psalm 65:9-13 and Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 delivered by the Rev. Alison Dutton Jacobs on Sunday, July 12, 2026 at the First Congregational UCC of Onekama, Michigan.

I have always been a little confused by our Matthew passage this morning. Most of the time Jesus tells a parable, makes a point or gives an historical reference and then gives no real explanation—he often tells his disciples "Let those who have ears, listen!" (Matt 11:15; Mark 4:23; and Luke 14:35) and leaves it at that, as if they will somehow be able to intuitively understand what he is trying to say. Sometimes he takes pity on them and takes them aside later and tries to explain, but most of the time they just don't understand what they are hearing. In fact, in the section of this passage, which is left out of the lectionary reading, Jesus tells his disciples just that: "To you it is given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven,. . ." (v. 11a) I am sure this just added to their anxiety, for we are often told just how little the disciples really understood of what Jesus was saying. In fact, our oldest gospel, Mark, says about the disciples on more than one occasion "But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him." (cf 9:32)

In this passage, however, Jesus gives his disciples a very detailed explanation of what the parable of the sower means. Each of the seed metaphors is painstakingly unpacked for their understanding. Because of this, I am led to ask, why this is, and I am led to look more deeply into the passage to try to find the core meaning. What is it about this "parable of the kingdom" that makes it so important that Jesus is so careful in its explanation? In other words, "So what?"

Well part of the answer, I think, is that the parables that Jesus tells are, in themselves, seeds which can fall on fertile or arid ground. The parables of the sower all carry this double meaning. I also think the answer to the question "so what?" is the common denominator here. The central fact in this parable, and in the

one that immediately follows this one about the sower who sowed good seed in the field, but while he was sleeping, his enemies sowed weeds (w. 24-30) is **that there is someone who sows**. The core of these parables, I think, is a call to be an active sower of good seeds.

Both our Isaiah passage and our Psalm speak of abundance of God's good creation. In the Psalm we hear how God "Visits the earth and waters it" and "crowns the year with bounty." In Isaiah we are reminded of how the "rain and the snow come down from heaven. And do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, . . ."

Just as a favorite hymn "We Plough the Fields and Scatter," often sung at Thanksgiving time, reminds us, we sow but it is God who waters. We are called to be sowers of seeds but are not really privy to how the seeds that we sow are going to turn out, because the fertility of the soil is not up to us—That is up to God. In this parable, the power of the seed illustration, is not a shallow moralistic lesson about where the seeds fall and their fate, but it is finally about the grace of God to grow goodness even in the thorniest of hearts and spirits.

However, this does not let us off the hook. God can indeed, as the Isaiah passage indicates, transform things. God can "instead of a thorn bring a cypress and instead of a brier a myrtle" but our job is still to attempt to sow good seeds, not thorns and briers. Because, and this is really important to remember, we can also sow bad seeds if we are not careful.

In her book Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Sons First Year writer Anne Lamott speaks of the seeds we sow as parents bringing up children, as she shares her own story of being a single mother raising her son, Sam. We can laugh along with her frustrations and cry along with the scary times and her fears. At one

point when Sam was two and being awful and destructive she calmly complains to her best friend, Pammy, “He’s a bad person, He’s already ruined.” And her friend said something that she says she has “clung to like the last heel of bread: ‘Sam has a deep core of sweetness within him.’” Pammy said. Her friend could see beyond the two-year old behavior to the good seed that was this beautiful, normal child. At another point, Anne, speaks of going to a therapist to clean out her old wounds so that her son won’t get “poisoned by all her fear and anger.” When she says this, we can see that she is indeed a wise mother—a wise sower of good seeds.

There is Wisdom Tale that goes like this:

A waterbearer in India had two large pots, one hung on each end of a pole, which she carried across her neck. One of the pots had a crack in it. While the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the mistress's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full.

For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to her master's house. The poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, the pot spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream: "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you."

Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?"

"I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your mistress's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water bearer said, "As we return to the mistress's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path."

Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful flowers on the side of the path. The bearer said to the pot, "Did you

notice that as we walked out to the stream, I scattered seeds on the side away from you that is why there are flowers there.”

“That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I had planted flower seeds on your return side of the path so that when we walk back from the stream you've watered them.”

“For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my mistress's table. Without you being just the way you are, she would not have this beauty to grace her house.”

We are all called to be sowers and to let God find a way to water and nurture, like he did through the pot that was cracked. It is not okay to sit back and let the other guy do it. We must muddle forward and dig furrows and scatter seeds and allow God to do the nurturing and watering, believing that if what we have planted is meant to flourish--it will—through God's grace. Amen.