

It's about the soil

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

I have two ailing plants in my office, and my colleague, Catherine knows that there is a reason. I am not a gardener. I don't notice those poor things enough. I yearn to. I'm a work in progress.

One commentary this week points out that how we plant seeds is important to gardening, but, perhaps more important to gardening is the state of the soil.¹

It is so easy to focus attention on that sower, throwing seeds with abandon every which way. No seed research and development done in advance. No thought given to where the seed is tossed. Just enthusiastically scattering – most intriguing to watch. If you are a farmer or gardener, you might call this irresponsible. Terrible stewardship! Look at them throwing away most of those seeds.

Modern Bible scholars tell us that at the heart of this passage is generosity – a Creator who is not risk averse. No, indeed, this is a God who is extravagant, and wants us, made in the holy image, to emulate that extravagance.

I think that this passage, today, in COVID-19 times, speaks to us about being generous and non-judgmental – both about how we give and to whom we share what we have. But, to be generous, we also need to *experience* God's grace. *It is about the soil* – about how receptive our hearts and minds are to love of God and love and care of others.

When we are starving, literally or metaphorically, we are not particularly inclined to be very generous. We need to tend to our own spiritual lives, our soil, before we can care for others. Jesus' parables are, by definition, open-ended – that is, they invite each of us to determine the meaning, and figure out how we connect. So, what is the Spirit saying to you today through this Bible image, of sower scattering seeds, generously casting those seeds near and far? Could the seeds represent "grace", God's love for you just because you are, well you. Could those seeds be of forgiveness offered to you, even when you can't let yourself off the hook. Maybe those seeds are surprising gifts, no particular reason, you didn't earn it, just a welcome joy in a tough time.

On this balmy summer morning, we might reflect on the question: Would we notice if a seed came our way?

Catherine tells me that my plants in my office require attention. It's about the watering, the pruning, but it's also about the soil. These can be challenging times to care for our spiritual soil. It doesn't happen on its own. It takes work, intentionality, tending to our spiritual life. So do you tend to your spiritual life, your *soil*?

For me, I was in a pretty good rhythm before the pandemic. Exercise, being intentional about family time for me. But then COVID hit, and things closed. We have been living in our homes for months now. I'm going to confess that the deeper I delved into this seed

¹ Commentary on Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 by Holly Hearon, www.workingpreacher.org July 12, 2020.

and spiritual soil image, the more I realized: I have some work to do. I'm willing to bet that you do too.

The Holy Seed Sower invites you and me to pay attention to how we are doing... really. These are unusual times. Isolating times. Days are long and sometimes our emotions are frayed. We are not feeling very generous. Quite the opposite, we can focus inward. I think that many in the world are needing connection, a sense of hope for something different in days full of sameness.

There is a wonderful book about preparing your soil for seed. It is called *An Altar in the World*² by Barbara Brown-Taylor. In it she tells wonderful stories about how she found holy wonder in the most mundane aspects of her life.

We have very kind friends, the Emirys, who have a dairy farm. Keith has a busy routine, as dairy farmers do, that starts early. But in the quiet moments between chores, he walks around with his cell phone, takes spectacular photos, of bugs, flowers, spiders, but all revealing remarkable detail. The colours, the textures. I think that this is one way that Keith tends his spiritual soil.

We have seen polarity in our world, and most recently hearing bad news stories as our finance people are taking stock of the impact COVID-19 has had on our economy. What aspect of life can you pay attention to today that will reveal wonder, surprise? How can you remind yourself daily of the truth we find in faith, that this world we live in is truly full of miracles? The wonder that my 9-year-old son who exhibits, just as he did as a 3-year-old, kneeling down looking so carefully. He still squeals when he holds a slimy frog. I roll my eyes.

Years ago I was privileged to know Jake, a smart, careful youth, who had in his short life gone through so much tragedy, life on the streets of Kingston, surviving as a sex trade worker he was fighting an addiction to cocaine. He was part of a program that paid young people to get healthy, to find stability and possibly a job. Jake's joy was building little *kalimbas*³ from Zimbabwe. He even sold a few. But he absolutely loved to play them. He drove us crazy, but this practice, creating, playing connected him with joy.

In these challenging times, how do you tend to your soil in life? The Holy Gardener is scattering seeds indiscriminately as I speak – experiences, moments of wonder coming your way. Maybe we can then share that generosity, that joy, by encouraging a member of our family, a friend, even a less familiar neighbour whom we know weighed down by worry – encouraging them to tend their soil, to be aware of wonder all around them too. Amen.

² *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*. Barbara Brown Taylor. Harper Collins, 2010.

³ Kalimba (Mbira), for more information go to <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mbira>