

The Parable of the Sower. We're all probably very familiar with this parable. Seeds thrown on all different kind of places, but some seeds grow, others wither, some burn, and still others get choked. Jesus tells this really good short parable, but then we have a long explanation for it.

The author of Matthew does this a lot. This author is a Jew, and schooled in Jewish Midrash--midrash takes a text and kind of pulls it apart and looks for meaning. Midrash is kind of like a sermon. You will find it throughout this gospel: Jesus will tell a parable and then he will explain it in painstaking detail. Or-- Matthew will explain it in painstaking detail.

Parables are- by their nature, short, to the point, and open-ended, leaving the listener to ponder the meaning on their own. And then there's Matthew.

One of the reason scholars think the explanation of the parable is Matthew's commentary-- is the title Jesus gives this parable: the parable of the sower.

The Parable of the SOWER.

But in the commentary we get an a long explanation of what happens to the seeds-- like this is the parable of the seeds.

But it's not, it's the parable of the sower. So let's look at the sower.

A sower is someone who plants seeds. Now, I'm not a gardener, but most of the gardeners I know are very careful about the whole planting process. They make sure the soil is prepared, fertilized, gets an appropriate amount of sun and water.. it is pretty obvious to me-- a NON-gardener-- that seeds are precious little things that require a lot of coddling.

So let's check out the gardener in this parable. This gardener is not preparing anything! This sower is just kind of throwing the seeds around indiscriminately-- tossing them where ever the whim takes him. This gardener is tossing them on rocks, in sand, among thorns-- oh my gosh-- what is wrong with this sower?

Nothing. Nothing is wrong with this sower. This sower is amazing, and very wise. THIS sower is extravagant, tossing seeds everywhere he can reach. This sower isn't

worried that the seeds are only thrown in perfect places. The notion of perfect soil, perfect plants doesn't seem to do much for him.

This is a parable about God. God is the sower. And this sower seems to know that seeds can grow anywhere. Anywhere. I did some browsing on the internet this week and I found seeds that defied the odds- seeds growing with rotten soil, barren soil-- or NO soil. I found pictures of plants growing through fences, and barns and even through cars! I found seeds sprouting in water, on sand, on rock, and THROUGH rocks! You name it, and I saw pictures of seeds growing there.

God knows what our gardeners miss. Seeds can grow anywhere.

But some seeds didn't survive. It's true.

I grew up with woods all around me and in those woods were little rocky quarries-- with pools of water. Every spring we would see millions of tadpoles in each pool of water. But not all of them hatched into frogs. Not every seed bears fruit. God doesn't work like we work.

We till the soil and fertilize and water and expect every plant to survive the germination process, and we are frustrated when they don't. Here's the hard truth of this parable: sometimes seeds don't thrive where they are tossed.

Sometimes people are born into places where there is little to no chance of survival. People are born into abuse or starvation, sexual exploitation or violence. But the sower sows everywhere. The sower knows that it is possible to grow and flourish anywhere, even in the worst circumstances, when the odds are against us. The sower doesn't give up on the places where hope is lowest. He throws the seed there anyway. Maybe the sower sees something in those places that we don't see. Maybe the sower knows that no seed is ever really lost forever, and there is hope and purpose to all seeds, not just the ones where we can control the outcome. With this sower, with God, all things are possible-- even when we, from our mortal vantage point, can't see it.

We read from the prophet Isaiah this morning. Isaiah speaks a hard truth: we will never completely understand why God does things. There are questions we can't answer. Why do some seeds wither even when lavished with time and attention,

and others that in all likelihood should fail-- grow. Isaiah's prophecy speaks to this. We began the reading this morning at the 10th verse. Let me go back two verses further-- so you can hear God's whole answer:

*My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and snow fall from the heavens and return not again, but water the earth--bringing forth life and giving growth---seed for sowing and bread for eating, so is the word that goes forth from my mouth---it will not return to me empty; But it will accomplish that which I have purposed, and prosper in that for which I sent it.*

What is that purpose? We may never know.

We aren't the Sower. This Sower doesn't plant like we plant. The Sower's extravagant gesture of planting everywhere he can reach may seem oddly ungardener-like to us. But the sower knows- that like a poppy from a rock, his seeds can grow anywhere. Amen.