

“Godspell: The Parable of the Sower”
Matthew 13:1-9

Many of you watched the football game last Sunday between the Bills and the Jets. One interesting commentary I heard from someone who went to the game was about the Jets’ kicker who missed the field goal twice. The comments went something like this, “How could the person who trains to be a kicker miss the goal twice? This is what they train for and work on all the time and they get a lot of money for this. How is this even possible? How could they keep their job?”

Even though I am not a football fan, I understand the frustration. I am sure in practice and without the pressure of the crowds, this young man has a much better average of accuracy than one third of the time. But with nerves and the pressure of having to get the ball in, his average went down. I see in this example a metaphor for our lives of faith. When things are calm and we are not under pressure, we know our potential for good and can align our actions with it. But when the pressures of life, our emotional hurts, and our fears dominate our thinking, we start missing the point and we lose our way. How often do we miss the big goal that is in front of us and is supposedly easy to see? In the story of the Magi, we know that they missed the point by going to Herod first to seek the newborn king. They knew in their hearts the message about the birth of Christ, but the pressures and systems of power around them misguided them to go to the royal palace in Jerusalem instead of the humble manger in Bethlehem. Even when it comes to hearing the parable of the sower, we tend to miss the big picture of it and get stuck thinking that the parable is all about us instead of God’s grace. We think that the parable is only about us being open or closed to God’s word and grace and thus we miss the larger picture of God’s grace. Parables were not just short stories with simple meanings. They were Jesus’ way of challenging the dominant systems and ways of thinking.

So today, I would like us to listen to this parable from a different perspective, in order to reclaim some of its radical implications about God’s grace.

(Adapted from a script by Nancy Townley)

Roula:

“The Sower scattered the seed, not afraid of where it went. Some of it landed on rocks; some on sand; some on insufficient soil; some on good ground. The Sower did not withhold any of the seed. It was joyfully scattered, broadcast widely to the whole of creation.

People:

Do you believe that? The Sower just threw it all away, everywhere. You’ve got to pay attention to where you put the seed. You can’t just throw it around. That’s foolish and wasteful. What’s the matter with that Sower anyway? In times like these you have to guard against so much. You can’t just give the seed to anybody. They have to be the right ones.

Roula:

“Some of the seed might fall on rocky ground, where birds come and eat it up. Some of it

might fall on places where the soil is not deep enough and when the plants sprout up, they do not have sufficient nourishment to be sustained.”

People:

See! The Sower understands. You take lots of risks when you scatter the seed so broadly. We need to be responsible to see that the seed is not wasted on those who don't understand or appreciate it.

Roula:

Risk is what it's all about. You never know when something will take root somewhere you didn't expect. If we are too careful, too controlling, we might lose something special, coming from an unexpected source.

People:

So, in other words, we are supposed to trust in the judgment and generosity of the Sower. Well, maybe that's not so bad. It's not up to us to determine where the seed goes. The Sower will take care of that. We spend so much time worrying about who's supposed to get the seed. We need to trust the Sower. We need to let go of our own fears. Maybe something surprising will happen. I guess I can let go and let God, if you know what I mean. That's the hard part--relinquishing control and trusting God. Yep, that's the hard part, all right.

Roula:

A sower went out to sow . . .”

Looking at this parable with a focus on the sower shows us that the sower seemed to discard the common sense of farming by scattering seeds where there is little potential for growth. The people who first heard this must have thought that the farmer was foolish because he chose to sow the seeds on the wrong kind of soil. Farmers in those days were not rich. Their livelihood depended on the success of their crops. Good seed was hard to come by; and the wise farmer made sure to entrust the precious grain he had to the best of soil. But this one tosses seed wherever he can find ground. The farmer behaved as though that which was most precious was available in unlimited supply.

This parable must have been shocking to the people who listened to Jesus. He used a common event from their daily lives to turn their understanding of God upside down. That is the way Jesus used his parables to help people understand that the kingdom of God was so different from what they thought it to be. The parables were not just cute stories that helped him illustrate a point. They were rhetorical tools that got rid of the hearers' preconceived notions about God and life in order to clear the way for a new understanding. The parables were supposed to help people wake up to see God's vision for the world.

Now most of us when we hear this parable start thinking about the types of soil that we are, whether we are good or bad. This is our orientation. This is part of our preconceived notion about God. We tend to focus on ourselves as the ones who make or break the

deal! Yet, the deeper wisdom of this lesson that shatters all of our conventional wisdom is that the grace of the kingdom of God is not entirely dependent on our actions. The grace of the kingdom of God is dependent on God's generosity. In our conventional wisdom, we may see that God is a reckless and foolish farmer, but through the wisdom of the kingdom of God, we see that God's love is lavish, generous and even abundant. God's grace is available to all. This is not to say that anything goes because these things will take care of themselves once our relationship with God is at the center of our lives.

The wide broadcasting of seed is indicative of the abundant nature of God. This is hard for us to accept. How could God be generous to all people, especially those who don't deserve it? How could God be so accepting of us even though we are often a major disappointment to ourselves and to those who love us? Paul Tillich, a well-known theologian, once wrote, "the hardest thing about being Christian is accepting that we are accepted." Much of our spiritual journey is spent learning to truly accept God's love for us and living in that same Spirit of love as we relate to others.

Our obsession with fixing the world and making sure that things are being done in the right fashion can sometimes work against our desire to live in the presence of God. Yet, Jesus' invitation to us to live in the kingdom of God is to live a life of focus on the generosity and love of God. Our calculating minds want to know if we are doing things right and well. We even worry about others doing things "right." But the radical message of the gospel is to pay attention to the Spirit's work of love of the Spirit in our world.

The musical *Godspell* was produced as a modern parable to help wake people up to the teachings and path of Jesus Christ. In the early seventies, *Godspell* was a new way to retell the old story of faith. It was supposed to reach out to people who had left organized religion because they had been disillusioned by the hierarchy and patriarchy of the Church. *Godspell* shows an image of Jesus with his friends sharing and acting out the stories of the parables to embrace a life of deep joy. Every generation has to rediscover the teachings and ways of Jesus for themselves so that we can live by his wisdom for ourselves.

We need the same spirit of joy and new connection to God today. The big goal is right in front of our eyes and we keep missing it. We keep trying to find happiness and peace through violence and greed, even though these have been tried and found to be lacking. I would like us to come up with "**5 key teachings about God's grace that we often miss**" and need to be repeated and experienced by us until we get them:

I would like to end with a video based on Richard Rohr's book *The Universal Christ*:

<https://youtu.be/TcoN2K5alkU> Amen.