

Do It Anyway



<Read Mark 4:1-8, 13-20>

*¹Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. ²He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³“Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seed fell on the **path**, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Other seed fell on **rocky ground**, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷Other seed fell **among thorns**, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸Other seed fell into **good soil** and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.”*

*¹³And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?”¹⁴The sower sows the word. ¹⁵**These are the ones on the path where the word is sown:** when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. ¹⁶**And these are the ones sown on rocky ground:** when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸**And others are those sown among the thorns:** these are the ones who hear the word, ¹⁹but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²⁰**And these are the ones sown on the good soil:** they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.”*



In CA, we have a lot of clear blue sunny skies in the summer. Not many days when it looks like this with fluffy clouds. As a child in England though, summer days often had fluffy clouds and one of the things my brothers and I enjoyed was lying down and looking up at the clouds to see what objects/characters/pictures in sky.

There was no right answer we had the freedom to be as creative as we could.



But, when we look at paintings we are not usually given the same creative freedom to see anything we like. We ask: What it is a picture of? What did the artist paint? What point was the artist trying to make? If the artist tells us what it is, then that is all we will ever see. Explanations box us in. They suppress our

creativity. Good art will evoke our mind and our emotions.



Jesus used parables to teach his disciples, and by extension us. But, he left us to struggle. Parables do not have just one meaning. They turn our thinking upside down. They have to be experienced rather than studied or interpreted.

Today's scripture that we just heard was of course a parable. A farming parable. And in this case Jesus offers us some clues as to its meaning. But let's be careful not to get locked into his literal words and remember that parables are deeper than that.

When we listen to a parable like this we put ourselves in various places, in this case as the different kinds of soil. We treat it as allegory. The different types of soil represent different types of people. We internalize the story and we all want to be the good soil where the seeds take root. That can then cause us to pass judgment on others as not being as good as us. Or it can cause us to think that we are the rocks or the thorns and feel bad about ourselves, that we will never be good enough. And being realistic: Sometimes we are good soil, sometimes not. But where do we go with that information? How does a path or rocky ground become good soil? The parable leaves us sort of stuck.



So let's think some more. Perhaps there's another perspective. Why did Jesus call this the Parable of the Farmer/Sower? What insights can we experience? Where's the surprise, the twist in this parable?

Seed never does well planted on paths and rocks and thorns. That's no great surprise! **I think that the surprise in the story was that the farmer sowed his seeds on paths and rocks and thorns!** Farmers are not rich. To poor people, seeds are a valuable commodity. Recklessly throwing seeds everywhere is not a wise choice. That's a lot of wasted seed and money. The sower is behaving as though what is precious is in unlimited supply. What is he thinking? We think of responsible stewardship as guarding money/gifts



So, if God is the farmer, what does the parable tell us about God? What is God doing? God is extravagantly and with exuberant generosity distributing the seeds. God is not making any judgment about who those seeds are going to take root in. **God does it anyway.** God does not judge what the results might be.

What about if instead of thinking of ourselves as the soil, we think about ourselves as the farmer sowing the seeds. I think this parable is telling us to be extravagant sowers with those faith seeds. To **Do It Anyway.** You never know. Can you tell just by looking at someone how they will respond? You are here because someone was reckless

enough to scatter and throw seed to you. If we do not waste seeds, then we will not reach some people.



20+ years ago at the church that Adrian and I were attending in the UK we were involved in prison ministry. The Church was near open prison where men sentenced to Life served out the last couple of years of their sentence. These would have been very serious crimes. As you can imagine, that made most of them middle-aged. An open prison is one without high walls where they are being rehabilitated to reenter the community. One of the initiatives was to give the prisoners day-release passes and to place them in jobs in the local community. We lived in a Market Town with a Saturday market and on Saturdays the church opened as a coffee shop. We had a succession of prisoners helping in the kitchen at the church. They would be with us for about a year and then they would be released. During that time, we were able to show them the love of Christ. One of the men that we had built a relationship with reoffended not long after he was released. The church went through a long period of Prayer and Discernment. Should we continue with this ministry? Finally, we decided to carry on spreading seeds knowing that sometimes those seeds would not take root.



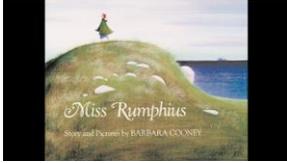
We are called to take risks. Spreading seeds or God's love is not always successful. It is risky. The willingness to make mistakes, to waste time and energy is a necessary part of the process. We need to *Do It Anyway*. If we do not sow the seeds, then there is no chance of them taking root. If we want to be a church that truly welcomes diversity, shares with the poor, and liberates the oppressed, then we need to take risks & try new things. We need to talk about difficult topics, to let go of some things and embrace others, to use everyone's gifts, and to not pass judgment on who is what type of soil and on the soil we are sowing in.



You did that here when you had those difficult conversations around whether to become a Reconciling Congregation and truly welcome ALL into your midst. And although we did not officially send a contingent this year to the Sacramento PRIDE parade last Sunday morning, I know that some of you were there sowing more seeds.



This parable of the sower has good news in it and a promise that we can claim. God sows everywhere & reaches us wherever we are. And when the seeds do manage to land on fertile soil, Jesus says the harvest is of miraculous proportion (30/60/100 fold).



There is a great children's book that I remember reading to my children when they were little. It is called Miss Rumphius by Barbara Cooney.¹

This book tells the fictional story of a woman Miss Alice Rumphius who as child visited her grandfather at his house by the sea and sat on his knee and listened to his stories of faraway places. Alice would say, "When I grow up, I too will go to faraway places, and when I grow old, I will live by the sea." Her grandfather told her there was a third thing she must do. "You must do something to make the world more beautiful." Well Alice grew up and eventually she did travel the world and retire to the sea. She never forgot her promise to her grandfather to do something to make the world more beautiful. But she couldn't figure out what to do. One day she plants a few lupine seeds in a stony area in the garden of her house by the sea. The next spring, she is surprised that from her bedroom she can see lupines blooming in the stony ground. The following year as she is out walking one day up and over the hill she sees a large patch of lupines. The wind and the birds must have carried the seed. And that gives her a wonderful idea. She buys 5 bushels of lupine seed and then goes on lots of long walks scattering the seeds everywhere she goes. Some people called her "That Crazy Old Lady." But the next spring there are lupines everywhere! And each spring after that, there are more and more lupines. Now Miss Rumphius is very old, and they call her the Lupine Lady. She has a niece called Alice, to whom she tells stories of faraway places. And her niece says to her "When I grow up, I too will go to faraway places, and when I grow old, I will live by the sea." And Miss Rumphius says to little Alice that there is a third thing she must do. "You must do something to make the world more beautiful."



How do we become Miss Rumphius? Where are you going to plant lupins / seeds? What is Grass Valley going to look like because you are bearing fruit? And because we together are bearing fruit?

Every meal cooked at Hospitality House, every lunch made for Habitat for Humanity, every can of food given out by Interfaith Food Ministry, every backpack purchased for a student, every diaper distributed to a parent-in-need, every Christmas gift purchased for a family escaping violence, every health kit assembled for emergency relief is a life changed, is a fruit and part of the harvest.



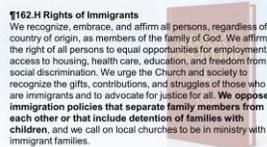
And this week, as I thought about that sower riskily throwing seed everywhere, I have been wondering about what we should be saying and doing about immigration and the separating of children from their parents. So, I am going to throw a few seeds out here right now. And I'm not sure where they are going to land!

¹ Barbara Cooney, *Miss Rumphius* (New York: Viking Press, 1982)
Read aloud here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DrjPzbuxLJU>

As I am sure you know, recently, the U.S. Administration announced that it will begin separating families and criminally prosecuting all people who enter the U.S. without previous authorization. This includes asylum seekers. On Friday, the Department of Homeland Security confirmed that 1,995 minors have been separated from April 19 to May 30. That doesn't include those taken in June. That is close to 48 per day, or 2 children every hour.

I've read reports of parents being told their children are just being taken for a bath and then they are not returned. Of a mother breast-feeding and having her baby ripped away from her. Of a separated two-year old in a facility having a melt-down and guards told they cannot hold or comfort the child. And pictures of cages. And proposals for Tent Cities. While it is hard to sort out which stories are true, there is no doubt in my mind that it is absolutely horrific. It is cruel and inhumane.

We are violating Human Rights as defined by the United Nations.² Rights that we insist other countries obey. The American Psychological Association warned that the separations threatened the mental and physical health of the children.³ Our own United Methodist Book of Discipline says in paragraph ¶162.H



¶162.H Rights of Immigrants
We recognize, embrace, and affirm all persons, regardless of country of origin, as members of the family of God. We affirm the right of all persons to equal opportunities for employment, access to housing, health care, education, and freedom from social discrimination. We urge the Church and society to recognize the gifts, contributions, and struggles of those who are immigrants and to advocate for justice for all. **We oppose immigration policies that separate family members from each other or that include detention of families with children, and we call on local churches to be in ministry with immigrant families.**

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And to make it worse, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, is himself a United Methodist and he is using the Bible as justification quoting specifically Romans 13:1-7, verses that have long been used to justify Southern slavery, authoritarian rule in Nazi Germany and South African apartheid.



Two things I would encourage you to do. FIRST. Speak up. Sign any petitions you come across; alongside writing letters and making phone calls to our elected representatives including our congressman Doug LaMalfa who I understand supports separating families.

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/05/world/americas/us-un-migrant-children-families.html>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/14/opinion/children-parents-asylum-immigration.html>

⁴ United Methodist Book of Discipline 2016.



SECOND thing I would encourage you to do. Make sure you can argue back with those using scripture. By taking isolated verses of scripture you can make the Bible say almost anything! Yes, Romans 13:1 says: *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.* Earlier verses detail what love looks like: *Let love be genuine, hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord... extend hospitality to strangers.* (Romans 12: 9-11, 13) But if you read a few verses after in Romans 13:9-10, it says: *[the commandments] are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself."* Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. We spend a lot of time of Thursday mornings talking about how we read and interpret scripture with nuance and not always literally, so that it is a living word of liberation and not oppression. I want to encourage you to come to our Bible Study so that you are able to talk confidently about your faith and scatter seeds of love in soils that are hard.



The good news is that God is an indiscriminate sower. Our extravagantly wasteful sower God never gives up on us. God calls us to take risks and be equally generous in mission. Ultimately against the odds God's seed bears fruit. We have the promise of abundant fruitful lives. A tiny seed can take root and bear great fruit.

So, let me ask you this morning. What seeds do each of you have? Are you guarding them or being generous? Are we as a church scattering seeds **indiscriminately** around Lake of the Pines, Alta Sierra, Grass Valley?

When I decided upon the title of today's sermon, I also remembered poem that is often attributed to Mother Teresa and hung on the wall of her children's home in Calcutta. The original poem was called *The Paradoxical Commandments* and was written by Kent Keith. I want to finish with it this morning. So here is Mother Teresa's *Anyway Poem*⁵

People are often unreasonable, illogical and self centered;

Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives;

Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies;

Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;

Be honest and frank anyway.

What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight;

Build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous;

Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow;

⁵ http://www.prayerfoundation.org/mother_teresa_do_it_anyway.htm

Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough;

Give the world the best you've got anyway.

You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and your God;

It was never between you and them anyway.

Let's not worry about where we sow, and however crazy it seems, let's just **Do It Anyway.**

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

Let us pray.

Lord of the harvest, teach us to be reckless sowers, scattering the seeds of the gospel in the most unlikely places. Fill us with the spirit and joy of wasteful generosity. Enable us to be a church that is together making the world more beautiful. May we lay claim to your promise that the harvest is great. Amen.

Resources

Peter Woods, "A Parable of the Prodigal Sower" in *The Listening Hermit*.
<http://thelisteninghermit.com/2011/07/05/a-parable-of-the-prodigal-sower/>