



## Seeds & Fruit



<Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23>

*<sup>3</sup> And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. <sup>5</sup> Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup> Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup> Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup> Let anyone with ears listen!"*

*<sup>18</sup> "Hear then the parable of the sower. <sup>19</sup> When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. <sup>20</sup> As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup> yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. <sup>22</sup> As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. <sup>23</sup> But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."*



One of the things I missed doing when we lived in California was looking up at the clouds. The summer skies there are blue & cloudless. Yes, it is lovely to be able to plan outdoor events knowing the chances of rain are slim. But it is very hot. I am enjoying being back here and the cooler weather and the variety of clouds, although the last two weeks --- I have appreciated less!

*This is the view out of my kitchen window this morning.* When our children were little, I'd lie on ground with them looking up at fluffy clouds looking for objects or characters or pictures in sky. There was no right answer, we had the freedom to be totally creative as what we saw.

On the other hand, when we look at a picture that has been painted by an artist, we do not usually have that same creativity to see anything we want. We ask ourselves: what it is a picture of, what did artist paint? We read the title or the explanation stuck to the museum wall. Explain the picture to me, we say. The problem is that if we are told what something is, then that is all we will ever see. Explanations box us in and suppress our creativity. Good art evokes our mind and emotions.



Jesus used parables to teach and he left us to struggle. There is usually not just one meaning. Parables turn our thinking upside down. They have to be experienced rather than studied and interpreted.



The most common way of thinking about today's parable is to consider the different types of soil as different types of people as Jesus himself does with his explanation. I could do that today, but I am not going to. The problem with that approach that I am wrestling with is that we all want to be the good soil that grows good things. And that can lead us to passing

judgment on others and judging what type of soil they are. And, if I am being realistic: Sometimes we are good soil and sometimes we are not. There's good and bad in each of us. But that leaves me asking how a path or rocky ground or thorny areas can become good soil. And then the parable leaves me sort of stuck as it does not go there. So, I wondered if there's another perspective we could consider today? **Why did Jesus call this the Parable of the Farmer/Sower?** What insights can we experience if we ask that question of the parable?

It was no surprise that the seed did not grow on the path, in the rocks or in the thorns. **The surprise is that the farmer sowed the seeds there.** Farmers are not rich. To the poor: seeds are a valuable commodity. The sower did not make a wise choice on a scale that measures effectiveness. There was lots of wasted seed. *You might just as well have burned money.* **What was he thinking?** The farmer behaves as though what is precious is in an unlimited supply. The farmer demonstrates extravagance and exuberant generosity **without** judging.



We think of responsible stewardship as guarding our money and gifts. But how about comparing God or Jesus to the farmer and the seed to the Word of God. If we want to be Christ-like, then we are going to have to be the farmer in the parable and do-it-anyway and not judge what the results might be. Because you never know, some of those seeds might take root anyway. You are here because someone was reckless enough to scatter and throw seed to you. If we do not waste, then do not reach.

Many years ago now, I lived in a town in England near an open prison that housed life-prisoners that were close to the end of their sentences. Life sentences of course are for murder and other very serious offences, and as they were long sentences the prisoners were mainly in their 50's or older. It was a market town and on Saturdays the church was open for coffee. The church agreed to take part in a prison ministry and a Lifer, a prisoner, would come every Saturday to work in the church kitchen making coffee and washing up. When that prisoner was released, then he would be replaced by another prisoner. One of the first prisoners that we had reoffended committing a murder not long after he was released. There was a lot of sadness and anger and questioning of the risks. It took a lot of prayer and discernment before the church decided they would continue with the ministry. and carry on spreading seeds on hard ground.

Spreading seeds or the word is not always successful. We need a willingness to **make mistakes and take risks.** Wasting time and energy is a part of the creative process. If we do not sow seeds, then there is no chance of any fruit.

If we want to be a church or a circuit that truly ... welcomes new people and reflects the diversity of the community, then we need to take risks & try new things. We need to talk about difficult topics that those in our neighborhoods are concerned about. We need to let go of some things and embrace others. We need to be using everyone's gifts. And not passing judgment on who is what type of soil and on what soil we are sowing in. As we come out of lockdown, this an important question as we assess what ministries we restart and what we have been doing during lockdown that we were not doing before that needs to continue, and what we have never done that we need to begin to do. What risks do we need to take, knowing that it may not bear fruit?



And talking of fruit, the parable has more good news in it & a promise that we can claim.

1. God sows seeds everywhere & reaches us wherever we are
2. The harvest is of miraculous proportion (30/60/100 fold)

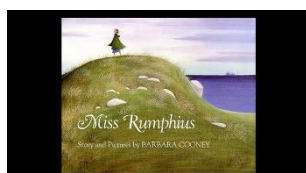


3. Even seeds on path can grow: think of plants see in cracks & unusual places. All it needs is the right conditions and plants will spring to life. Cactuses can thrive in rocky ground. I purchased this one at fund raiser at Chantry and it has grown, even with little water. *I am*

*not known for my indoor plant skills!*



So, let me ask you this morning: What seeds do each of you have? Are we guarding them or being generous? Are we scattering them indiscriminately around Ipswich and the surrounding communities?



Do you know the story of Miss Rumphius? It's a children's book that I read to my children when they were little. Let me summarize the story!

*When Alice Rumphius was a little girl, she lived with her grandfather, an artist, by the sea. During the day, he let her help him with his paintings. In the evening, he talked about his childhood in a faraway land. Afterwards, Alice would say, "When I grow up, I too will go to faraway places, and when I grow old, I too will live beside the sea." Her grandpa told her one night, "That is all very well, little Alice, but there is a third thing you must do. You must do something to make the world more beautiful." Alice grew up, became a librarian, and traveled the globe. When she was old, she settled in a house by the sea. But how, she wondered, could she make the world more beautiful? Finally, she got an idea. She ordered bushels and bushels of seeds, and for months, she sowed them near and far. Some of her neighbors called her "That Crazy Old Lady," but she persevered. And the next spring, when the hills and meadows were covered in lupins and a jamboree of color and her neighbors romped through them with glee, she knew she had done "the third, the most difficult thing of all." and made the world more beautiful.<sup>1</sup>*

How do we become Miss Rumphius? How will you make the world more beautiful? Where are you going to plant metaphorical lupins or seeds? What is Ipswich going to look like because you are bearing fruit? And because we together are bearing fruit?



We are called to be disciples who make disciples. We are the fruit of seeds that were planted. And as fruit, we bear seeds and those seeds must be planted extravagantly. We are called to live abundantly and generously. And when we do ... then God can bring a bigger harvest or return in our lives than we even imagine is possible. 30 60 100 fold.

Every tin we donate to someone through FIND, every child we help with a craft project, every meal we give to a homeless person, every phone call or visit we make to a lonely person is a life changed. Every rainbow we hang on a fence, every item we recycle, every time we speak up against racism is a life changed, and is a fruit and a part of the harvest.



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

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Cooney, *Miss Rumphius* (London: Viking Books, 1982) and <https://grandparenteffect.com/how-miss-rumphius-made-the-world-more-beautiful/>

May we be a church that is together making the world more beautiful. May we lay claim to Christ's promise that the harvest is great.

Thanks be to God.  
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/>