

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ 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. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ Let anyone with ears listen!"

**Trinity Presbyterian Church
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"Lessons in Green: Sower and Soil"

There are patches in the front yard where the grass won't grow. All you can see is the red North Carolina clay. One afternoon the kids helped us to seed the front lawn. At first, they would scoop out the seed and then dump the whole cup out into a mound. "No," we said, "you have to scatter the seed." So we took a fistful of seed and tossed it around to show them. But wouldn't you know, we turned our backs for just one second and the youngest one was throwing seed all over. Seeding the driveway, the asphalt street. Even sowing the walkway leading up to the front door. "No, no no," we yelled, "you're wasting good seed!" We scolded the child, but in the parable Jesus uses a wasteful sower as the hero of the story. "Let anyone with ears," says Jesus, "listen!"

Right away a question sprouts: who would waste good seed on bad soil? Why invest valuable resources in fields that aren't going to produce? Saw a movie long ago. The title is lost in my memory. It was about a bunch of troubled high school students in their homeroom class. The kids are monkeying around as the bell rings. The teacher speaks up, "Quiet, quiet class!" The kids paid no attention to her as paper airplanes floated across the room. The teacher started to snap a ruler on the desk, "Now class the bell rang, class get to your seats!" Then a giant spitball skids past her head sticking to the blackboard behind her. Finally, she snaps, "Why am I wasting my time on failures like you!?" Perhaps we've been there. In the classroom of life we have all learned where not to waste our resources. It would be foolish to invest our hard-earned cash into a stock that is going bankrupt. We learn not to waste our breath talking politics to relatives who are as stubborn as we are. Even in church we like to sow our influence in fields where there is some sort of return. The parable is outrageous! To say the sower is reckless is an

understatement. He's a fool! So as we start, we wonder, who wastes precious earthseed on failing soil?

Well what if? What if an irresponsible sower is the best way to describe who God is? A God who is generous. A God who continues to love abundantly. Always pouring out grace especially in the world's most impossible places. In the alleys where only the shadows notice when a young girl is being trafficked. Sowing in neighborhoods of terror, where poverty begets violence again and again. God sowing in the dry fields of racism, xenophobia, fear. Reminds me of a story about an African American blues artist named Daryl Davis. Daryl takes it upon himself to go out of his way to speak with members of the KKK. At first, they would throw racial slurs at him. But he would just look at them and ask, "How can you hate me when you don't even know me?" So eventually they would talk. Daryl would listen with an open mind. They'd meet again, talk some more until a friendship began to bloom. Over the years he has met with hundreds of white supremacists always with the word, "How can you hate me when you don't even know me?" Peek into Daryl's closet and find dozens of retired KKK robes and hoods. All given to him by his new friends after they quit the hate club. Just imagine how much more God is sowing possibility in the impossible places! Why waste good seed on barren fields? Because it is who God is. Perhaps we just never know when a seedling is going to take root.

Of course, when we listen to Jesus we hear him say the type of soil matters as well. Jesus helps us to interpret the meaning of the soils. There are some seed that falls on dirt paths and becomes bird food. It's like when evil comes and pecks away at our courage. Then there is the rocky soil—you know the times when we leave church wanting to make a difference in the world, but then the hardships come so our energy withers away. Then there are the thorny moments. When our provisions mean more to us than the love of our neighbor and it chokes the life out of the gospel. You see what Jesus is doing? He's naming the terrain of our lives. We've all allowed our fear to discourage us. There have been times when our faith has become kiddie pool shallow, especially during the hard times. We have all grown attached to our stuff and it has suffocated the opportunities for gospel growth. Right there! That's me! Jesus is helping us to interpret the landscapes of our lives. Sure, the Sower keeps sowing. But let's not forget that the type of soil matters!

Except there's one more type of soil. Do you remember what it is? It's the good fodder. The humus that receives the seed of life, nurtures it and bears tasty fruit during harvest time. You know I once took a joy cruise around Winston Salem. Found a small farmer's stand on the side of the road. There was a sign that caught my attention. It read, "The Tastiest Produce in North Carolina." I thought to myself, *well I'm feeling adventurous—why not!* So I pulled the car over on the side of the road and approached the stand. There was the produce all lined up in crates: Tomatoes, peaches, even had some cantaloupe. I'm not even sure cantaloupe grew in North

Carolina, but there it was. I walked up to the farmer who stood around in bib overalls and a John Deere ballcap and asked, "So you have the tastiest produce in the state, do you?"

"Here, I'll let you taste it and decide for yourself," the farmer replied.

He picked up a plump red tomato looking so full of life, pulled a pocketknife out from his overalls and sliced me off a wedge. As soon as I bit into it my taste buds exploded. "Wow! That's one darn tasty tomato and I've had a lot of tomatoes!"

The farmer just smiled and picked up a peach that was colored like a sunrise. Then he cut off a piece for me to try. Again, my eyes got wide.

"Lavishly delicious and so juicy!"

Then he pulled a cantaloupe off the pile, sliced a chunk off the rind with his pocketknife and said, "Now, you have to try this."

Friends, I swear on every bible on this side of the river, if the angels served cantaloupe in heaven, this would be what it would taste like.

"Tell me sir," I had to know, "what is your secret?"

The farmer in bib overalls said, "No secret. I just got lucky and happened upon some good soil."

"Is it in Winston Salem?" I asked.

"Why yes, yes, it is."

"Is it in Winston Salem, *North Carolina*?"

"Yes..."

"Well would you mind telling me where this good soil is located?"

"Oh, it's just down the road a little ways. It's a place tucked away into a nook just down off the street. I recollect the people there call it Trinity Presbyterian Church."

Today as the choir sang and the children's noise filled the room. As we pray for our world and for our friends who are suffering. Whenever we welcome a stranger or share the good news of the gospel, I get that same savory taste in my mouth. And then it occurs to me. I recognize this taste.

It tastes like grace.

Let anyone with ears...