

Good Morning! I am Pastor Lisa Telomen, the new associate pastor at the United Methodist Church of Geneva. I am very happy to be joining you in ministry, and to be partnering with you in planting seeds of God’s love here in Geneva and beyond. And, what do you know, but that is the message of our text today, that I want to explore with you now in our time together!

The text is called “the Sower,” and is about sowing, or planting seeds. Actually, Jesus is telling us about how God plants seeds, in the first part of our text.

Those of you who have met me already, know that I love to grow things, and love to garden: houseplants, flowers, vegetables, it’s all good! In fact, I have already planted some seeds in the raised beds on our patio! A few days ago, I planted sunflower and squash seeds; today when I checked on them I was surprised and delighted to see that some are already coming up! God’s rain has got them started! I find, and perhaps you do too, that sowing seeds, and growing things, gives me hope, even and especially in hard times.

The second part of our text today, talks about the different soils into which God’s seeds of love fall, many falling into difficult places to grow. Many scholars think Matthew wrote this to encourage his congregations to not lose heart when their evangelism falls on deaf ears.

I think many of us today feel we are living in difficult times and/or places. Many of us know people who have been sick, or died even, in this pandemic. Many of us know, or have ourselves, experienced job change or job loss during this pandemic. We fear for our children’s well-being, and for our parents’ health. We are anxious about our own safety, whether, where and when to wear a mask, where to shop safely, when we can relax, safely, if ever... We each need a little more understanding, forgiveness, and a little help from our friends with cooking, rides, tech-ing, mowing, perhaps... We all have had times where cares or riches have choked out our pleasure, our love and happiness in this new world of pandemic. We know the stresses of these different soils, as Matthew describes them. I hope and pray we all know the joy of the good soil, too, in our lives.

Scholars and we like to discuss and argue and fret about what the different types of soils represent, and who is stuck in them and why, and whether we will get stuck in them... but the truth is, we all pass through them at different times in our lives. Scholars **do** all agree that the Sower is God, and that the seeds are God’s word, love and grace, poured out everywhere, for everyone.

II Let's explore more of what Jesus tells us about the Sower, about God's work of blessing in our world, in the first section of our text for today:

Jesus tells us that God is planting seeds of love indiscriminately, and abundantly, over every kind of soil, to reach us all. Now, the fact of God's indiscriminate and abundant planting does disturb some, who think God should be more orderly, organized and discriminating about who gets blessed, and when and where God does the blessing.

But, nevertheless, the Sower goes out to sow, and the seed falls EVERYWHERE!

Some of you farm, or perhaps have grown up on a farm, and know that this type of planting is called broadcasting the seed: flinging it out by hand or a tool, in front of and around you, as you walk up and down a field.

This is not how I planted my sunflowers and zucchini – I planted them by carefully digging holes and placing the seeds in the ground, and then covered and watered them. Nor is it how I plant beans or peas: I dig a furrow, and carefully place the seeds in the trench, and then cover them and water them.

God's method, to broadcast the seeds, is used most often now for planting grasses or cover crops, where it doesn't matter if the plants grow up in orderly rows; the point is to cover the ground, and the yield of what grows in good soil will more than make up for what falls in rocky patches, or gets choked by weeds. The crop produced is abundant enough to make up for any losses.

So Jesus is telling us that God's blessings are poured out all over the world! God knows our lives sometimes have hard, or rocky or thorny places, but God also knows our lives have many good places, fertile places, and the bounty produced can make up all that was lost and offer more, to seed still other lives. Sometimes it is easier for us to hear and receive and heed God's saving love, than at other times. Sometimes our cares, or others' harm, prevents us from receiving the Good News. But other times, others help to clear out the rocks or thorns, and sometimes they help to loosen the hard-packed soil, the weights that are holding us down.

Jesus tells us this story to encourage his disciples, and all of us disciples since, so we can trust and know that God's love is raining down upon us; God's grace is scattered over our lives: God's salvation is poured out all around us, always—and it will produce enough and a lot more somewhere, sometime in our lives: through our seasons of abundance, or with a little help and sharing from our friends. We will be loved and cared for abundantly, always.

III Jesus and Matthew tell us this story also, to encourage us as we scatter and plant the Gospel for still others, as Jesus instructs us at the end of Matthew, in chapter 28: “You go and make disciples, baptizing and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Jesus asks **US** to scatter the seeds of God’s word and love and grace, throughout the world too! As he has done, as God has done, we are invited to do: loving one another, caring for one another, planting love in the hard places, rocky places, even among thorns; trusting that as we scatter love **everywhere**, it will grow and produce enough to bless everyone. Paul tells us in I Corinthians 3 that “We plant the seeds, and God gives the growth.” So even if some of our seeds planted do not produce, we can take heart, knowing God will give enough and abundant growth in their season, somewhere, sometime.

John Wesley, founder of our Methodist movement with his brother Charles and other friends, is said to have encouraged the Methodists to “do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, to all the people you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, with all the zeal you can, as long as ever you can.” This is how God and Jesus love, and how we are called to love. Wesley organized people into small groups, knowing that with a few good friends, we can grow more securely in God’s word and love through prayer, study and service together, so that our faith and friends can help us get through some of the hard, or rocky or thorny times we experience.

Many of you have planted seeds of generous love and grace for my family as we have moved into the parsonage here in Geneva a week ago. You have eased our transition and settling into community here with gifts of cleaning and painting, repairs and weeding and trimming! You have given gifts of snacks and meals, gift cards and greeting cards. Thank you! What could have been a hard or rocky passage was made so much easier by your abundant love poured out for us!

Some of you have literally sewed (with an e) seeds of grace as you have sewn face masks for friends, family and people in need. Thank you for that! We all have different gifts, don’t we, different ways we can bless others and plant God’s seeds of love. Paul talks about this in I Corinthians 12 when he talks of how different parts of the body do their tasks to bless the whole.

As we shelter in place through this pandemic, we have been connecting more with family and with neighbors. Some of us know folks who have got sick, perhaps even family who have died; some of us have noticed neighbors who have lost jobs; some have noticed seniors who would be at risk going to public places. Many of you have stepped up, planting seeds of love and grace, to offer comfort to these who are grieving, to offer meals to those who are in financial crisis, to offer rides or to run errands for those with greater health risks. When our cups are

full or running over, we can pour out God's blessings to bless others going through hard or rocky places. Thank you for being there and doing that.

Like George Bailey in the classic movie "It's a Wonderful Life," we learn that our generosity not only blesses others in their time of need, but it also can come back to bless us in our time of need – and, it makes our life more wonderful as the love blooms and grows around us every day. When George closes himself off from others in fear and despair, God's angel Clarence reminds him that he has planted love all around himself, and THAT love can now produce fruit to lift him up in his time of need.

So let us take heart: God is planting love all around us, and we can trust that saving love to shower us with seeds of grace and love all of our days. And, Jesus is walking with us always, helping us to live well and prosper, and plant God's love in other's lives, too! So let us bloom and grow God's love in our families' and our neighbor's lives, and even go beyond, to bless God's family in need around the world: through our apportioned giving, through UMCOR and UNICEF, and others. Our brothers and sisters can be blessed by our gifts, to get through the rocky and thorny places they face now. Let us share God's word and love in prayer, in teaching, in service and with our gifts. Let us sew, and sow, what? Sow LOVE! So what?! So God's love can reach and save more people from despair and death, FOR hope and love and life in God's kingdom grace, now and forever. Amen!

Welcome to worship today with the people of the United Methodist Church of Geneva, Illinois! We are so happy you have chosen to worship with us today, and we pray that you will experience God's love and grace as you share in word and song with us.

I am Pastor Lisa Telomen, associate pastor here at the church, and I invite you to come along with me as we explore what it means for us to receive and share the seeds of love and grace God sows in our lives. Wait, is God sewing with a needle and thread? No, we are talking about planting – Jesus tells us that God is sowing seeds of love to grow a crop of blessing for everyone in our world.

Let's prepare for worship together in prayer:

Gracious God, we give thanks for the many ways that you touch and bless our lives. We ask that as we listen to you today, that we will hear and heed your Word for our lives, that we will grow in faith, and that we will be held in your love and strengthened to love and serve you more faithfully in our world. May our worship honor and bless you, O God, as we offer you our hearts and lives in this time together. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

I invite you to share Wesley's "do all the good" mantra with me, as our way of blessing and encouraging one another in faith and service:

Let us go forth, to "Do all the good we can,
In all the ways we can
For all the people we can
In all the places we can
With all the zeal we can
As long as ever we can."

Let us go forth, to love and to serve, planting seeds of grace with Jesus Christ. To God be the glory, Amen!