

Proper 10, July 16, 2017

Fr Joshua D Nelson

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Gardening!

I really love gardening . . . at least the first part. The harvesting was always been harder. In fact I remember one year when we planted two long rows of beans and waited and waited and waited and waited. Nothing came up. My father was extremely frustrated. Nevertheless we had a few extra packets of seed so we went out and planted two more long rows of beans. Sure enough these rows began to sprout the little green leaves could be seen from our back porch.

Shortly after the breaking of the soil from these new sprouts we noticed a lot more green. But this green was in the wrong place. All the sudden - out of nowhere and extremely late, the two rows we had planted in the first place decided to produce. Through the hot months July and August we spent nearly every day in the field . . . picking beans . . . picking beans from sun up to sundown. We even invited my friends from the neighborhood to come and help. We offered them pizza in exchange, so we didn't have to eat all the beans in one sitting. We spent weeks stringing, breaking, and canning. We had enough beans to last us through the year or more. And it was such a bumper crop there was still tubs of leftovers. I recall standing with my sister at the door of our church after the Sunday evening service with bags and buckets of beans offering them to members of our congregation as they left to go home - begging them to take some of this harvest.

Whenever I read today's Gospel parable I can't help but remember that story, and I remember the aching knees and pain in the back. But I can also remember the bumper crop we harvested that year. That year which began with uncertainty. What we thought would produce nothing either by famine, or bad soil, or just bad seed, had yielded forth 30, 60, even an hundred fold. That year I learned the important lesson of trusting things to God's hands and the joy of giving out of our abundance. My family still refers to that as the **YEAR OF THE BEAN!**

But our garden had much more planning involved than the farmer in the parable we here today. The sower who goes out to sow some seed has sown by broadcasting. Now most of the time broadcasting is done by walking across your field and kind of throwing the seed where you would like it to grow, but the actions of the sower in Jesus parable could actually be considered bad farming practice. You're not going to find this recommended in any *Farmers Almanac*. He just takes a handful of seed pulls it out of the bag and tosses to the left, to the right, forward, behind, everywhere, haphazardly. He must be really trusting in God because he's just letting it fly.

Now here's a little bit of exegetical free advice. Matthew offers us an interpretation of this parable. I'll say that again, it's Matthew's interpretation. If ever you are doing your own private devotions or group bible study, and you come upon a parable - you read through the parable and then discover what looks to be an interpretation STOP! Stop reading, go back to the parable, and focus on that. Pray for God to reveal it's meaning to you. Now I say that because the lesson you are meant to learn from the parable may change over time. A different portion speaks to you, a new revelation is made now, because you find yourself under different circumstances in your life. As the preacher today, all I can ever do, is offer you what has been revealed to me through my study of the scripture, my life experience, and within my prayer for this community. So we are going to ignore the prescribed interpretation for now, and attempt to keep ourselves from being boxed in by limiting our mind and spirit to understanding in new ways. Deal?

So this is what I want you to do with me, let's place ourselves in the roll of the sower. For a moment, this morning, let's become what appears to be a *bad farmer*. We have the opportunity to take our seed and broadcast it with abandon. Throw it every-which-way to love everyone, preach truth to the powers and proclaim the Gospel; to live a life of peace and love and understanding and acceptance to everyone everywhere. The Harvest is not our doing, planting the seed is. Now some of it's not going to produce at all. And some of it's not going to produce in the way or in the time which we plan it or hope for, but we have to trust God for the harvest, even if we never see its fruit.

Two weeks ago I was going to the office and getting books in order in and finding different things. I came across the register of services for this Parish going all the way back to 1964. In fact the first half of the first page is services that were all conducted in Mary Feeser School. This is my nerdy moment. Not only am I liturgics nerd but I'm also a bit of a history buff. So I got a little too excited about the opportunity to sit down and read through the Register of Services from 1964 till today. I've only up read through 1966, but it has been an extraordinary journey so far. I've witnessed the ebb and flow the of daily life of this parish as it has been recorded in black and white on the pages of those registers. I have found random Tuesday Morning Eucharistic celebrations with only two people. I can see when Sunday services are held, how many people are in attendance, how many people are receiving communion. I see every wedding, every baptism, funerals, and services of anointed healing. Father Smith recorded some of the smallest details.

This congregation was formed out of a mission of St John the Evangelist in Elkhart. Some seeds were broadcast to the Simonton Lake area and a family was formed in the North. How are you continuing to broadcast that seed? We are called to go out and continue the planting. My prayer is that we will appear to the rest of the world like bad farmers, that we will love with abandon. That we will preach peace and live the gospel among the thorns, on rocky soil, in the Sun, on the path to be trodden, and every once in awhile our seeds land in some really good, dark, rich soil. Some of you may be here today as a result of someone else broadcasting seeds in your direction.

Think with me, how are we doing this? You don't have to know right now but I want that question to burrow in the back of your mind, to be a seed planted, to take root. Something to be thinking about. Please feel free to share it with me or other members of this community. We do not need to think about the harvest, God will do that. But what part of the field do you feel being led to walk through? What kind of seeds are you throwing out? What are we broadcasting and where does it go?

Throughout the last 50 + years there have been seasons of drought and seasons of bumper crop. I haven't been here long enough to know where we are right now. But I pray that together we'll take the example given us in today's parable. Let's appear to the rest of the world to be some really bad farmers, and see what God can do with us.

AMEN.