

Sunday Sermon July 12, 2026

Grace that's freely given wants to freely be received.

All the grace you've sowed on us can hardly be believed.

And all that we can offer you is thanks. All that we can offer you is thanks...

The Parable of the Sower is one I always loved teaching about at summer camp. In the beautiful little chapel in the woods, I'd have the kids move all the chairs to the sides and sit on the floor.

Then I would ask them to use their imagination. To imagine the sower in the parable. A woman or man with a big bag of seeds hanging on their shoulder by a strap. "Picture the sower reaching into the bag, pulling out big handfuls of seed" I'd say. Some of the seed spills out on the path the sower is walking on, but the sower doesn't even notice. Her hand flies forward and backward, seed dances in the air, getting caught in the breeze, it flies everywhere and lands gently, like a spring shower.

At that point, I'd go behind the pulpit and pick up a burlap bag filled with seed that I had hidden there. I'd pull out big handfuls of seed and scatter it on all the kids.

"Over and over the sower casts the seed" I'd say, with seeds filling the air. Seed falls everywhere: on the rocks, among thorns, on shallow soil, on good soil.

But the sower doesn't even notice, her only focus is throwing the seeds, generously. The sower doesn't carefully place a seed in only the best soil, digging a hole with a trowel, placing, covering up. "The sower casts seeds everywhere" I'd say, as seed fell on every head, into every outstretched hand as the kids all laughed and ducked and brushed seeds off their heads and shoulders and each other.

Now I considered reenacting that here in church this evening/morning but decided I'd spend hours vacuuming afterwards – but hopefully you get the point. God pours out God's grace and love generously, lavishly – recklessly if

you will. It is not given as a reward just to those who receive a good report card. It's poured out abundantly on all of us, all the time.

And that grace, that love, looks for some good soil in which to be planted, so that it might take root and grow. For this is not just a parable about the sower – God – this is a parable about the soil – us.

And make no mistake, my friends, we are all a mix. We are good soil, open and fertile and receptive, and we are stones and thorns and hardness in our hearts. But no one is just one or another. The good soil is there. God's grace and love seek a home in each of us. They seek good soil in our heart that will allow the seeds to take root and grow and produce more seeds that might be scattered to take root and grow, so grace and love will spread.

And then I would walk around and hand each camper a stalk of wheat. A single seed, in good soil, had produced this stalk that has many seeds that might find the sower's hand, or the wind, and be planted in good soil to produce even more.

That's us – campers, parishioners – we are the soil in which God's grace and love are planted so that they might grow and spread to others. So that there might be more kindness and love, goodness, generosity and compassion in our world. So that God's kingdom might come here, on earth, as it is in heaven. Seeds of Kingdom looking for good soil in which to be planted.

And then I'd tell a story. A true story about a high school softball game. It was a playoff game, the winning team would move on to the state championship. Late in the game, the score was tied and a player who was not the most skilled or the fastest was put in to pinch hit.

She had spent more of her time on the bench, and everyone knew it, but the coach was running out of players and so there she was at the plate.

She watched the first strike go by, and everyone thought they knew what was coming, but she reared back and sent the second pitch over the left field wall. A home run! Her first ever.

Down to first base she went, jumping and elated, so exuberant that she tripped on the base and hit the ground – hard – twisting her knee. She couldn't get up.

Her coaches consulted the umpires. Could her teammates assist her in rounding the bases? That was not allowed. But she needed to touch each base and home plate to score the run, so it appeared she would be called out.

Until the first baseman on the opposing team approached the umpires. She asked if she and a teammate could assist the injured player. The umpires consulted the rule book and saw that there was no rule against the opposing team assisting an injured player, and so that's what they did.

The first baseman and the right fielder picked her up and carried her to second, gently lowering her to touch the base. Then third. Then home. That home run ended up costing the opposing team the game.

After the game, the first baseman was asked why she did it, and she said it was simple: she put herself in the other girl's shoes. She imagined it was her laying on the ground, embarrassed, looking for someone to help.

A compassionate heart, good soil for the seeds of kindness and empathy to grow and spread.

I find the television commercials for St. Jude Hospital very touching. The stories of children with cancer and their frightened parents. Just \$19 a month makes a difference for those in need. Less than what you're paying for Netflix can help a suffering child. That little seed of generosity.

I love what's been happening with Love Sanibel Back this summer. Gestures of gratitude for people often overlooked. Thanking our island workers and neighbors. Donuts to the first responders, "thank yous" and snacks for Larry the UPS driver, Heike the front desk worker at the Rec Center, and the utility workers cleaning out the sewers.

Seeds of gratitude – contagious and meaningful – small gestures that grow and spread and produce an abundance.

We are the soil where God seeks to plant seeds of empathy, generosity, gratitude, grace and love, fellow Followers of Jesus, so that they might take root and grow and produce more fruit, so that the Kingdom of God might come near.

The ushers will now come forward – you are receiving a gift today. A stalk of wheat with its seeds. Let it be a reminder to sow God’s empathy, generosity, gratitude, grace and love generously – even recklessly –

And also a reminder to **be** good soil for the seeds of the Kingdom.

Amen