

“Going to Seed” series, week 1

Pastor Leah Rosso

Matthew 13: 1-9, 28-

For the next few weeks, we’re going to hear a lot about seeds. The Gospel of Matthew shares multiple stories of Jesus using seeds as metaphor, as parable, as signs of the Kingdom of God. I’m sure Jesus used these metaphors because the people he lived with and talked with were immersed in the agricultural world. But I also read somewhere that if Jesus hadn’t used agrarian metaphors he would’ve been arrested much sooner. Think about it. If you talk about taking down the empire, calling out abuse of power, and shining a light on corruption, people in power start to pay attention. But talk about seeds, fields, lost coins, and sheep, and it sounds like you’re just telling stories.

So in the Gospel of Matthew, we have seed stories. And this morning’s seed story is about a sower who goes out to sow. Only it doesn’t seem he’s given any thought to where he wants things to grow. He throws seed on areas where thorns grow up and take over what was planted. He throws seed on the path where birds come and eat it. He throws seed on rocky ground where the seed sprouts but then can’t grow roots. And then some of the seed indeed falls on fertile soil where it grows and produces fruit. And I think of our amazing land stewardship folks here at church and the countless hours they have pulled weeds and taken out thorns and tried to make the prairie more hospitable to the native plants, and I wonder whether this sower has a plan at all. All the gardening books I’ve read talk about knowing the soil– getting it ready; testing it to find out what you can grow. But our sower seems a bit, well, less than strategic.

A few weeks ago Susie and I went to a preaching conference in Philadelphia. And while in Philly, we found a mosaic garden right in the heart of the city. It is called “The Magic Garden” and began years ago when Isaiah Zagar, a sculptor, painter, and mosaic artist, began taking pieces of broken and discarded ceramic things and making mosaics out of them. It continued to grow over the years, with Isaiah constantly cementing his art into walls around the city, and in the past couple of years they were able to create an indoor museum, an outdoor walkway, walls of mosaics that shimmer and shine in the sunlight so much so that I needed sunglasses to walk around. Susie and I went out and up and down and through and we still hadn’t seen all there was to see. But one of the best parts, is that while that was the part that you now pay for, when we kept walking through the city, we

could see that the artist didn't contain himself to that plot of land. There was a mural over on this building, another on the outside of a church building, and other pieces of mosaics here and there that just seemed to spill out of the cracks of the city - you could tell that Zagar was passionate about art being everywhere made out of every thing - and it kept showing up in surprising ways. I think if Jesus had been familiar with Zagar's art, he may have said, the Kingdom of God is like an artist in the city, who takes broken items: bottles, mirrors, plates, silverware, and constantly creates and builds beauty into every nook and cranny, making magic in the heart of the city- a place of refuge; a sparkling oasis.

Last fall, Nadia Bolz-Weber, a Lutheran Pastor and theologian, decided to walk the 200 miles from the Irish Sea to the North Sea in England with her husband. She had just finished treatment for breast cancer, and there seemed no time like the present. They walked in prayer; in attention; in companionship with one another at a time when the world seemed both scary and sacred. And she said the whole time she just kept thinking to herself, "This is the world. This is the world. This is the world." In a world that curates bad news for us all the time, as she saw each plant; each perfect blue sky; each neighbor that said hello, she would think to herself, "this too is the world. This too is the world." With each step she reminded herself that the beauty of God's world is also abundant. Every step, the Kingdom of God.

And if you want to stick with the metaphor of seeds, then I have another story for you too. In Gaza, where Palestinians used to be farming the land to grow food, as much as 80% of the cropland has been damaged or destroyed. Farmers who had once been the backbone of Gaza's economy and food culture for generations, are now longer able to access what they need, including seeds. But people like Rawan, a woman in her 30's who once farmed the land, are determined. She fled her home with wheat seeds in her pockets. At the camp where she stayed, she grew wheat - not much, but as much as she could - and gathered the seed. When she returned, she returned with seeds to once again plant wheat in her homeland. She grieves at how little of the land she is able to farm now, but says that she will continue to grow what she can because this is what she does - she plants and harvests and feeds people and then begins again. (WCK.com) The Kingdom of God is like a woman who saved seeds as she fled for her life; grew those seeds in a land that was strange to her; and then returned home to continue growing the seeds of her past and the seeds of her future.

Jesus says that God's Kingdom is like seeds that get thrown out into the world. The world may not be ready for them, and in some places they may not grow or they may get choked out; but rather decide where those places are from the very beginning, God just keeps sowing seeds; keeps tossing them into every nook and cranny; because there will be places where they will grow and take root and bear fruit.

And what is that fruit? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. These are both the seeds that we share with the world and the fruit that grows in return - its a reciprocal relationship!

As a church, it is not our job to fix all of the problems of the world. It is not our job to have all of the answers or to condemn others who think differently than us. What is our job, is to go out and sow seeds of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness, and self control. And in many places they won't grow, and that's just the way it is. But like Zagar, we can take what is broken and give it new life; like Nadia Bolz-Weber we can notice the abundance of beauty in the places where we are; like Rawan, we can keep on in determination to feed people and to sow seeds in difficult times; because all of those things are also the Kingdom of God.

One of my favorite sayings of resistance these days, as we get overwhelmed or as we feel like what we're doing is not enough, is a saying from the Greek poet Dinos Christanopoulos. Because it's written in Greek, the direct translation is a little tough, but someone took his words and wrote the beautiful phrase, "they thought they had buried us; they forgot we are seeds."

It's a beautiful turn of words in general, but as people who follow the risen Christ, it is also the deepest truth - that even when the powers and principalities think they have won; God turns death into resurrection; Christ's body becomes a seed – buried and then rising to bring new life to the world.

Everyone who has ears, pay attention. The Kingdom of God is here.