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Eyes Wide Open: Sowing Matthew 13:1-9

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Some years ago I had the privilege of preaching at a high school baccalaureate service. It was a very cool experience. And when the service was over, lots of people came up to me and said, “Nice sermon, pastor” – which is like being told that your blind date has a really great personality.

In any event, I walked out of the high school when the event was over and I happened to follow a mom and dad and their graduating daughter. As they walked, the father said, “Well that was nice, though the preacher could have been shorter.” I don’t think he was talking about my physical stature. And just as he said it, both he and his wife turned around and saw me. The look on their faces was priceless. I thought the guy’s wife was going to come unglued. I wish I could have been a fly inside their car on the way home.

Interesting thing about proclaiming God’s Word – you just never know how it’s going to be received. Some connect with it and it changes their lives; others hear it and dismiss it. Apparently, that’s been true since Jesus was a preacher. It’s one of the key points of a parable we’re going to look at today – the Parable of the Sower. And perhaps that’s one of the primary reasons that so many of us are intimidated by the prospect of sowing seeds of faith with people. We just don’t know how we – or our witness – will be received. If that’s true of you, then I want you to know that Jesus’ Parable of the Sower has good news for us. Let’s read the story [Matthew 13:1-9 NLT].

The first thing to notice in this story is the generosity of the sower. Some might even say this sower is downright wasteful. Rather than carefully planting seeds in well-plowed ground, the sower in this parable broadcasts the seed, throwing it everywhere – in the rocks, on the path, into the weeds. This guy sows like I golf! No ancient sower in their right mind would plant seed that way. Seed was a precious commodity. You didn’t just run off to the Jerusalem Fleet Farm and pick

up a bag; it had to be carefully gleaned. The point that Jesus is making is that this sower sows liberally. There’s plenty of seed to spare and he simply trusts some of the seed he sows will find receptive soil.

And that has implications for us as a people called to make disciples. Just as this sower was generous in sowing the seed, we are called to be generous in sharing the seed of God’s Word.

Those seeds might be a verbal explanation of the Good News about Jesus or a passage of Scripture, but those are not the only seeds we’ve been called to cast. Sometimes we cast seeds of prayer. Sometimes we cast seeds of patient and compassionate listening. Sometimes we cast seeds of hope and encouragement. And sometimes we cast seeds of simple acts of kindness.

A while back I went golfing with three other guys from church. The weather was “iffy” all morning long, but it wasn’t until we were on the 18th green that the rain started falling, and when it fell it came down hard. One of the guys in our foursome was coming into the clubhouse with an umbrella just as the UPS guy was walking out. The poor guy had about a 50-yard dash to his truck. By the time he got there he would have been soaking wet. But without blinking an eye, my friend invited the UPS guy under his umbrella and walked him to his truck.

It was a simple act. Jesus’ name was never mentioned. It didn’t need to be. My friend WAS Jesus in that moment. Remember Jesus’ words, “Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven”? If God’s people would generously, liberally cast seed like that, the world would utterly change. Not everyone would become a Christian, but more would than are today.

I like to skeet shoot. There’s something satisfying about blowing clay targets out of the air. No one in their right mind goes skeet shooting with a twenty-two. The chances of a single bullet hitting a small moving target are next to none. Instead you skeet shoot with a shotgun. You blast out hundreds of little pellets in the hopes that at least one of those pellets will hit the target, and one is all it takes.

Never once have I ever mourned the fact that most of the pellets missed the target entirely. Never. I don’t ever give them a second thought. All I care about is the one or two that do strike the target. In fact, watching

that target break in mid-air is so satisfying that once you hit it you forget all about the fact that much of the shot missed entirely.

Now, I don't want to take the analogy between sowing the seed of God's Word and skeet shooting too far, but I do want to take it at least this far: when it comes to being sowers of God's Word, most of us spend way too much time worrying about our misses, or our potential misses.

And if that's true of you, then here's some good news from today's scripture reading – while the soil isn't perfect, the seed is. The sower cast the same seed all over the field, but some of the soil was not receptive. It wasn't that the seed was ineffective; it's that not all soil is ready for the seed.

Thank about what that means. We so often get hung up that we don't know enough or don't have the right words and so we never do anything at all when it comes to sharing the Good News of God's Word. I mean, what if someone asks me a question that I don't know the answer to!? Friends, here's what I know from experience: people don't usually come to faith in Jesus because we have the "correct" answers to their questions. Coming to faith ultimately happens not because our intellectual issues are addressed, but because our heart and soul has been touched. Faith is not about "what" or "why" but about "who." People simply need to know about the One who wants to love them to life. One of the most helpful and authentic and effective things you could ever say to someone you're trying to reach with the Good News of God's Word is, "That's a great question. I don't know the answer. Let's try to find out together."

And finally, when it comes to casting seed, it is our job to cast – in word and deed – but "success" is in the hands of God. The sower casts seed, but God makes it grow. We don't have to worry about "success." I take great comfort in a few things when it comes to trying to reach people with the love of God. I take comfort in the fact that Jesus didn't bat 1,000. Not even close. I take comfort in the fact that God promises that his word never returns to him empty. I take great comfort that even though most seed will not immediately sprout, those seeds that do sprout will bear an abundant harvest.

I don't need to tell you how broken our world is, but I will tell you that the brokenness of the world has a way of breaking open people's hearts and minds, making them more receptive soil for a word of encouragement

and hope. So take a moment right now. Consider where you might have the opportunity to cast the seed of God's Word this week. Maybe it's with a friend or neighbor or a family member. Into what soil might God be calling you to cast that seed? Now let me pray that the seed you cast will find receptive soil.