

Spring Lake Presbyterian Church  
Rev. Kathryn M. Treadway  
October 21, 2007

*Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23*

*13*That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. *2*Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. *3*And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. *4*And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. *5*Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. *6*But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. *7*Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. *8*Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. *9*Let anyone with ears listen!"

*18*"Hear then the parable of the sower. *19*When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. *20*As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; *21*yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. *22*As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. *23*But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

## **The GREAT Reaper**

Today we are going to be talking about how easy it can be to make the conditions just perfect for plant growth. I've been keeping this secret tucked away in my closet for, oh, a few years, but this morning I've wiped the dust away in order to provide you with a visual sermon illustration. Today, I will teach you how to sow seeds of . . . (Take box out) CHIA!

That's right, as all of the holiday info-mercials will soon teach us, you too can soon see how easy it is to raise your very own Chia pet! Simply submerge your pet in water overnight, spread on the seeds, make sure your pet has plenty of water and Wa-La! Within 5 days, your pet will yield a hundredfold!

Ahh, yes, the wonderful world of Chia where conditions are always perfect and the harvest is always plentiful!

Today's scripture lesson teaches us about a farmer who knew how to sow seeds, how to raise crops. Had the Middle Easterner been given a Chia pet, he would have had the know-how to bring forth an abundance of Chia. But . . . he farms the old-fashioned way, without a Chia-face smiling next to him, providing for him the perfect conditions for farming. This farmer was probably pretty poor and had only a limited number of seeds which he did not buy in a packet at the store, but most likely had gleaned for himself from last year's harvest. His family depended on him to plant well so that he could reap

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well, so that when it was time for harvest he would have provided for them food enough for the off-season as well as enough for trade. But this farmer was a bit foolish. You see, he did not sow all of his seeds on good soil. Somewhere along the way he started daydreaming and tossed some of his precious seed on rocky ground where they grew, but were unable to put out roots for the rocks, and so they died. And in his daydreaming he tossed some of his precious seed among the thorns where they could not even begin to grow for the thorns choked them. He was so caught up in his daydream that he dropped some of the seeds along the walking path, not even noticing that they were in plain sight of the birds who flew in and snatched them away. When he finally woke up and realized what he was doing, he tried to make the best of a bad situation and planted his remaining seeds in fertile soil, hoping that it would be enough to feed his family.

“Such a foolish farmer!” we cry. “Now he and his family will be hungry and may even die. He had enough but he wasted them for a stupid daydream!” But what is so amazing about this story is not that much of the seed was not able to yield, for in farming it is unheard of for ALL of the seed to put forth fertile roots. What is so amazing about this story is the harvest. You see, under normal circumstances, a farmer would yield a two-fold harvest. And a five-fold harvest would be cause for celebration for the whole village! But this foolish farmer who tossed the majority of his seed around mindlessly on the equivalent of a Walmart parking lot<sup>1</sup>, yielded an unheard of abundance! – as much as 30-fold, 60-fold, 100-fold!!!!

Are you shocked? Jesus was telling a parable about life, intending to provide a bit of “shock and awe” and I’d say he accomplished his purpose with his original audience. As we hear the parable today, we too are to be shocked and flabbergasted until at last we find ourselves in the story with the fools, the traitors, the doubters, with the “foolish farmers,” until at last we can wrestle not only with the story but also with ourselves, to the point where we finally embrace our faith and allow Christ to be born anew in us.

Parables are intended to cause conversions. They are intended to cause us to wrestle with the stories of scripture until we evaluate ourselves and change. We come together weekly to worship God and we do so around the Word of God and with the Sacraments of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism that call us to change and be changed, that call us to be born into new life in Christ over and over and over and over again. As we listen, we can be changed, for God is able to reap a GREAT harvest in us – not just 2-fold or 5-fold, but 30, 60, 100-fold!

So as we wrestle with today’s parable, I want us to wonder together how it can change us today, and later today, and tomorrow, and next year, and throughout our lives.

But our initial thought is to point fingers childishly, is it not? Oh, *WE* know people like that – people who fritter away life, who daydream, who waste what they have on selfish ambitions and desires. *WE* know people who call themselves Christians but sow their

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.sarahlaughed.net/lectionary/2005/07/proper\\_10\\_year\\_.html](http://www.sarahlaughed.net/lectionary/2005/07/proper_10_year_.html)

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seeds of love, joy and peace in less-than-ideal conditions. But the question is never: how can we change *them*? The question is always: how can we change *ourselves*? How can we change ourselves to listen for the word of God, to make room for the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be planted in our hearts so that we are born anew day after day after day? Hour after hour after hour?

But we are the ones who have been entrusted with the seeds. God gives us the seeds and expects us to be good stewards of what we have, planting where we can reap a harvest, but we get lost in life, don't we? We're supposed to be out planting seeds in the good, fertile soil of God's Word, but the phone rings and life happens. A dear friend is sick, a grandchild needs a babysitter yet again, the house needs cleaning, we've got to get to a meeting, a memory paralyzes us, and we anxiously and unthinkingly drop the seed which has been entrusted to us among the thorns, in the rocks, and on the hard floor where we happen to be standing when the calls come. We spend our seeds on ourselves, on our unspoken priorities. And when we finally return to our senses, we have only a few seeds left. We plant them tenderly in the good soil. We invest our time, our talents, our money, our hopes, our prayers in the good soil and ask God to reap the harvest with the little we thought to share. And the parable tells us that God, the GREAT reaper, will reap a plentiful harvest out of those few seeds.

I believe that most all of us are people of faith – the question is, are we willing to take what has been given to us and wrestle with it so it changes our very hearts? Are we willing to be converted by the GREAT reaper? The more seed we plant, the larger the harvest will be. If we are able to sow even 2 seeds on good soil, the harvest can be as plentiful as 200 plants! But if we are able to sow 100 seeds on good soil, the harvest can be as plentiful as 10,000 seed-bearing plants!

The Spring Lake Presbyterian Church is becoming a field ready for harvest. We have been planting our seed carefully by giving generously of ourselves – to those in need, to friends who are sick, to children who need to know love, to a community full of retirees with questions about their faith and God's role in their lives. And as we have been planting, we are being changed. The Spirit of God is here among us, nurturing those seeds we know not how to tend, and teaching us through the scriptures as we wrestle with all that we are against all that keeps us from focusing our energy on the future harvest. There are times we want to hold onto our packets of seeds, our little packets of blessings, hoping that someone else will plant *their* seeds so that we can see a harvest. But why are we holding on so tightly? Are we holding onto our blessings because we don't want things to change? Because our faith is intensely personal? Because we're still not quite sure exactly what we believe? Or, despite our insecurities, our individualism, our doubts and uncertainties, are we willing to grasp hold of the seed of faith through which we have been blessed and plant it, trusting God to make it grow? We have to begin by making the effort, by taking the seeds out of their seed-packet, by removing the seeds that have been planted in us and placing them in the good soil. As stewards of what is God's, we must take all that has been given to us – time and talents and money and goods and resources –

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countless blessings – and we must dedicate them to God, asking God to harvest it for the future of God's church and God's world.

We must share the seed with which we have been entrusted with others, desiring hope and harvest. Because when we care about what we are harvesting, we want to tell the world! Look! God has blessed me! God has blessed this church! We are seeing miracles! God is blessing us with new members! God is changing my heart and his heart and her heart to be more open, more forgiving, more loving!

A few weeks ago in a sermon I mentioned quite passionately my love for bookstores and my excitement that Books-A-Million had opened in Sebring! I spoke so passionately that several of you told me you were on your way over to see it for yourselves. That's the kind of passion we need to share the seed of the Gospel! We have to be so excited about what God is doing in our lives, what the parables are asking us to wrestle with, what the release of self from our daily lives is allowing us to know and understand that we can't help but share it! We can't help but plant seeds in those who are ready to be changed by God's love as well!

You see, what God, the GREAT reaper, does is turn the seed into a harvest (take out Chia) that can yield another harvest (take out Chia 2) until the world is full of God's goodness and blessings. God can take those 25 seeds out of the initial 100 and turn them into 250 seed-bearing plants. If each of us planted only 1 of the seeds that God has entrusted to us, God could take the 130-something members of this church and turn us into 3900, 7800, even 13,000 members changing the world. We just have to be willing to wrestle a bit with the God who desires that we give more generously, that we care more deeply, and that we plant more faithfully. Amen.