

A Sower Went Out to Sow
Lectionary 15 ~ 12 July 2020
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

First Immanuel Lutheran Church, Portland
via Zoom during coronavirus quarantine
Pastor Joan Beck, retired

Praise to you, God of seedtime, growth, and harvest! Your word shall not return to you empty, but shall accomplish that which you purpose and succeed in the thing for which you sent it! Through Christ our Lord. Amen.



“Listen! A sower went out to sow.” This is how Jesus begins his words to a crowd of people who have come to the lake to hear him. It is the large freshwater Lake or Sea of Galilee, up north of Jerusalem. These rural people make their living farming and fishing and doing what needs to be done, and Jesus talks with them about their lives. He doesn’t tell them anything they don’t know. Or does he?

Today he talks about farming. At the right time in the spring, the sower goes out with a pouch full of seeds, and spreads them where they might grow during the summer, for a fall harvest. The sower is broadcasting or tossing out the seeds, not planting each kernel in a row. Inevitably some of the seeds fall where they will not grow well--on the path that’s been hardened by foot traffic, where the birds eat them up; on rocky ground, where the sprouts can’t find any soil or water to sustain them; and among the blackberries (or whatever weeds they have in Palestine) at the edges of the fields, where there’s no room for them even to sprout.

But some of the seeds--we even dare to hope, most of them--fall on fields where there’s space and soil and water and sun and time, and they grow. And here’s the surprise in Jesus’ observations: the size of the harvest. In his listeners’ experience, to net ten seeds for every one planted would be a good crop. But Jesus, with a twinkle in his eye (as I suppose) says, “How about a hundredfold? Yes, really. You don’t buy that? Then sixty. And thirty; I won’t go lower than thirty.”

I wonder where this place could really be? Where we could find a sower and seeds and harvest and abundance like this?



Listen! A sower went out to sow. He went on the internet as the coronavirus spread in February and March of this year and blamed the Jews for the pandemic and for the shutdowns, according to intelligence gathered by the FBI and reported by ABC. This American “sower” speculated that Jews were out to make money producing vaccines. His ideas found fertile soil among members of his group, and members of groups like theirs, in this country and around the world. They urged each other that if any of them became infected with COVID-19, they would try to deliberately infect Jews--and also law enforcement. Sowing seeds of hatred.

A United States administration official I heard on a news program this week condemned the Chinese for unleashing the pandemic on purpose. Sowing seeds of suspicion.

In the United Kingdom, as reported by CNN this week, activist groups are including Muslims as targets of their hatred and calling for them to be infected.

A UK government minister concluded that extremists seek to mainstream their narratives, why? “For the sole purpose of inciting hatred, violence, public disorder, and a breakdown in community cohesion.”

Sowers out to sow.



Listen! A sower went out to sow. Today, July 12, is the commemoration day of Nathan Söderblom, a Christian leader of church and society in Sweden in the first third of the twentieth century; July 12 was the day of his death in 1931.

(Many know that Christian churches honor a variety of saints, lifting up people who have served Christ in notable ways since New Testament times. We may think of Saints Peter and St. Paul, Matthew and Mark, Mary-the-mother-of-Jesus and Mary Magdalene, Patrick of Ireland and Francis of Assisi. Our Lutheran churches also lift up a variety of lesser-known servants of God by means of a calendar of Commemorations. You can find these listed in the front of the hymnal on pages 15-18.)

I thought that since Nathan Söderblom was Swedish, his witness might be of special interest for First Immanuel, with its Swedish heritage. Söderblom first worked as a pastor to Swedes living in Paris and as professor of the history of world religions at universities in Sweden and Germany. He and his wife Anna raised 13 children. The King of Sweden appointed him archbishop of the Swedish state churches, Lutheran churches, in 1914, when he was 48 years old.

Almost immediately World War I started, and besides caring for churches and clergy in Sweden, Söderblom initiated an appeal for peace and fellowship among all the churches in Europe, even the ones in countries at war. He had a consuming passion for Christian unity. He wrote, "Amidst this painful chaos [in a bitterly divided world] where nothing is clear, we encounter God's love which gives us the sense of higher coherence and deeper meaning than the coherence and meaning we are able to see and comprehend." Archbishop Söderblom organized a series of remarkable conferences that helped bring the national churches and denominations closer, in respect for each other and cooperation for justice and peace. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1930.

The editor of a Stockholm newspaper, a former critic, wrote in an obituary: "He was archbishop of the Swedish realm. He was the creator, organizer and leader of the ecumenical movement. He made the culture of Sweden known to the world, and the culture of the world to Sweden. He was one of the foremost in the movement for peace. But all these were only brilliant outworks. It was his warm, fascinating, enchanting personality, the child-like goodness of this open and burning human soul which won the victory."

Others mentioned his "untiring energy," his "courage, unflinching vitality and humor."

"He exercised leadership by encouragement and thoughtfulness, not by rules or the formulation of objectives."

And as far as sowing seeds goes: "If [Söderblom] traveled by train, sat in a waiting room, or came to a meeting, it was not long before he had exchanged words with everyone, noted who they were, and tried to say something encouraging." "He saw in a group of people nothing less than a number of opportunities for personal

contacts.” “Even if he only got a chair for an old woman in church, he did so ‘with all his heart.’”

“He believed in God, and so he was free.” To sow seeds for the peace and unity and love of Christ everywhere all the time.



Listen! A sower went out to sow. He sowed seeds of **invitation** among ordinary people, saying: “Come and follow me, and I will make you fish for people” (Mt 4:19). He sowed seeds of **healing**, “teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people” (Mt 4:23). He sowed seeds of **blessing**: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Mt 5:6). He sowed seeds of **challenge**--“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Mt 5:44)--**and encouragement**--“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28).

This sower himself became like seed. He fell on rocky ground when his humanitarian mission was politicized by his opponents. He was uprooted by resentment and fear, torn by thorns, nailed to a cross, discarded and buried in the ground. But God made his dying and rising fruitful (John 12:24): Through the gift of his Spirit, the Risen Christ raised up and sent a community of his servants and friends, who continue scattering the seeds of his words and actions, even to this day.

This sower is, of course, Jesus. None other than the one who taught Nathan Soderblom; none other than the one who teaches you and me.

And this morning Jesus invites us to his table again. Whether tired, timid, angry, anxious, groaning, grateful, worried, lonely, hopeful, or however we are feeling; however we are behaving; whatever we are saying or not saying, this meal of his presence in the bread and wine is for us. His body is grain of life for us; his blood is fruit for our refreshment. And “as the grains of wheat once scattered on the hills were gathered into one to become our bread, so [now] all [God’s] people, from all the ends of earth, are gathered into one in [him].”

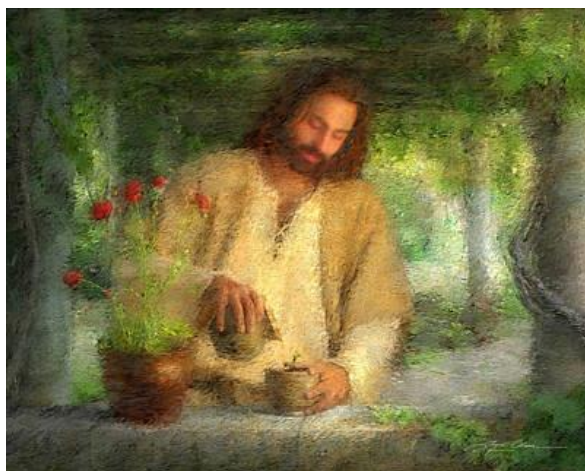
Listen! A sower went out to sow. Her name is Marie Claudine Mukamabano. She became an orphan in Rwanda in the 1994 genocide. As an adult she has founded orphanages, and mentors children without parents, and inspires teens through speeches and social media.



Listen! A sower went out to sow. Her name is Michaela Munyan and she is 9 years old. She learned to sew last fall in an after-school program at Trinity Lutheran Church outside of Detroit, Michigan, and she has used her skills to make and donate over 500 masks, and counting, to help protect people in this pandemic.

Listen! A sower went out to sow. They are families staying home, working from home. They are people wearing masks for the sake of the health of others. They are those praying for neighbors and strangers and, yes, enemies. They are those offering kind words of encouragement, practicing forgiveness. They are those making phone calls and writing notes. They are those planning to make their dollars and their votes count for justice and peace. They are found all over the place, thirty, sixty, a hundredfold.

We are. Found all over the place. A hundredfold.



- "I believe that the Word of God** has many times been planted in my life, often because of another who received the seed in ready soil, brought forth a harvest, and shared that goodness with me.
- "I believe that the call to be a sower** of the Word is a privilege and a blessing, that no one can ever earn the right or claim the duty that it is a gift freely given and a ministry to be constantly celebrated in gratitude.
- "I believe that great things can come forth** from even the tiniest seed planted in love and cared for tenderly in the heart of another.
- "I believe that usually only God knows** what sprouting and greening will come from the Word planted through my life. I am content in knowing that I have tried, with the Sower's grace, to seed that Word in faith and with joy.
- "I believe that even the most insignificant aspects of life** can be the seed of God's gifting, that deeper faith can root and mature in very ordinary soil.
- "I believe that some dying of seed has to take place** before it can give itself over to life, that every heart has its germination time, its dark moment, before the future hallowedness of harvest comes.
- "I believe that it takes much patience to sow a seed,** to freely give it away to the heart of earth, to allow it to take root and to grow in its own good time.
- "I believe that my life will always know its season of hope,** that I will find flowers after every finality of [winter], that I will find green, growing things after every harsh, barren reign of [drought].
- "And most of all, I believe in the Sower of all seeds,** in the God of [seedtime, growth, and harvest,] in the Giver of all good and growing things, my [God and my Gardener]! *(from Fresh Bread by Joyce Rupp; picture for this section is by Gary Olsen)*

Thanks be to God.

Note: This script contains some paragraphs that were not used when the sermon was delivered. Readers are lucky, you get it all!

Sources not mentioned above:

Extremist news articles quoted

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Söderblom info and quotes from

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Nathan Soderblom: Called to Serve by Jonas Jonson (Eerdmans?)

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<http://mama.globalfundforwomen.org/heroes/marie-claudine-mukamabano>

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