

Are you ready to hear some parables? I hope so because we are going to be hearing parables from Jesus this summer. I'd like to briefly introduce you to parables; the primary function is to take ordinary things and reveal the extraordinariness of God's Kingdom. Jesus had to find a way to speak to everyone who was gathered – highly educated people all the way to simple farmers and fishermen; people in government, in education, to artisans, business owners, elderly and children; literate and mostly illiterate. He had to find a way that nearly two thousand years later, the parable still means something to us. Another function is to set up an organizational structure on earth to hear, learn and participate in the parables. Jesus spoke in sometimes confusing ways and then taught the disciples the meaning. People who heard the parable would go to a disciple to learn the meaning. Jesus could have done this a different way; he could have written instructions down and all we would have to do is follow what he wrote; but he didn't – he gave wisdom and instruction to some people who were set aside for this purpose. That structure is alive and well today. I have been set aside – ordained – and am here to help you through these parables and see God's Kingdom in the ordinariness of life.

Starting at the beginning, Jesus spoke this parable to a large crowd gathered on the shore of a large lake. Imagine it like a natural amphitheater with everyone gathered around to hear him. He had to speak in short, direct sentences because they did not have amplification systems back then. He spoke in Aramaic; Matthew wrote his Gospel in Greek. I have two Greek to English translations of today's parable that I think you'll find interesting. First, Jesus ended the parable with, "Let anyone with ears listen." The direct translation is this: those with ears had better listen. Instead of an invitation – let those with ears listen – to a warning: all y'all had better listen. Think of it this way, imagine your mom saying "you'd better listen up"; she's not inviting, she's telling you to listen. I think Jesus is doing the same – listen up.

Matthew wrote: hear the parable of the sower. The word, "sower" in Greek is a verb. Translated literally, it would be, "Hear the parable of the sowing." But, it's not just a verb, it is used for someone; like this: the sowing-one, the one-who-is-sowing. As you can see, English can't translate it well. But there's one more thing – the tense. It's an aorist tense, which, yes, you guessed it, we don't have in English. The aorist tense is something that happened in the past, is happening today and will happen in the future. The sowing-one has sown, is sowing, will sow.

In terms of farming, the seed has been sown but what it will be is happening as it germinates and will then grow; produce more seeds, which will be sown, which will germinate, and on and on.

One more thing about the sower; this is how it was done in the 1st century: the sower would have a bag of seed, would take some in her hand and flick it with the wrist. It's the same motion for throwing a frisbee. That flicking motion is how one sows seed. That's the verb – it's all in the wrist. Has been, is, and will be in the wrist. There is a clear separation of duties in this – the sower is the one who flicks, throws, tosses the seed. God is the one who does the growing. It's

like God is saying, you do the sowing, I'll do the growing. The sower is to flick seed onto the path, onto rocky ground, into the weeds and on the good soil. The sower's job is to sow, God's job is to grow.

Have you ever told a child something and they didn't do it? Or, how about this, have you ever told a child to do something and they actually did it?! Children don't listen. We have to repeat ourselves; a lot. When we were children, we didn't listen. If we have children, and if they have children, those children won't listen. It's just how it is. The sower of the seed just keeps on flicking the seed. You have to repeat yourself to children because one day it will land on the good soil. But, you have to do a lot of sowing before that happens.

You know who else doesn't listen? Students; employees; customers; vendors; bosses; clients; you know, everyone. They don't listen. If you are a teacher, professor, manager, accountant, or any occupation dealing with people, you have to repeat yourself. You have to keep on sowing. Some seeds land on the path, some on rocky ground, some in weeds, but some actually lands on good soil and produces, sometimes one hundred-fold! But, that's not our job – to guarantee the fold – our job is to sow. To sow as we have done in the past, to sow today, to sow in the future. To keep at it. To keep loving as we are loved, to keep forgiving as we are forgiven, to keep sowing the seed. We do the sowing, God does the growing. Looking at it another way, God can't do the growing if we don't do the sowing. So keep sowing.

Here are a couple of modern-day examples. In the mid-90s I was a commissioned salesperson for a home electronics store. Electronics were super difficult and expensive back then. Well-trained sales people were necessary and it was a good living. It wasn't what I had planned on doing but there was a white-collar recession going on and, well, it was a good living. And, the best part, that's where I met Christi. Different story, but, very very important – was important, is important, will be important.

Picture this, I was in the Everett, Washington store. If you have never heard of Everett then you have not been in the Navy. Just north of Seattle, it is the largest Naval facility on the west coast and one of the largest in the world. It's also home to the largest building in the world – where Boeing builds the 737, 57 and triple 7.

Anyway, it was just after dinner on a Thursday evening. You remember Thursdays back in the 90's, it was must-see-TV time. So, the store was very slow. A tough looking woman wearing Navy fatigues with a very short haircut walked in. She had a reputation for insulting every salesperson that tried to talk with her. But, it was slow, I was getting bored. I looked at my friend and said, "I'm going to make her smile." He wished me good luck and I was off. Here's what I said, "It's Thursday, the best evening of TV, and you're in an electronics store?" She said, "At least I am not wearing an ugly tie." Okay, I expected her to insult me but I didn't think she'd make fun of my tie. So, I looked at my tie and then said, "I wear ugly ties to cover up the fact that I have a big nose and ugly feet." She laughed, slapped me on the shoulder and said, "You're alright." I then said, "Seriously, why are you not at home in front of your TV." She told me her

VCR – video cassette recorder – stopped working and she has to get home and record one show so she can watch a different one. We talked about what type of VCR she needs. Fifteen minutes later, Debbie walked out with one of our top-of-the-line models.

That was Thursday, on Saturday, two women walk in, holding hands. This is during the period of Don't Ask, Don't Tell; and, from what I've been told, the emphasis was on "Don't" tell." Anyway, this couple walks up to me and says, "Are you the tall guy that wears ugly ties?" Now, it was a Saturday, I was wearing a power tie, but, I said, "Yeah, that's me." They said, "We're Debbie's friends; we like her VCR and she says you took good care of her." I asked them what they are looking for and they said they wanted a video camera for an upcoming vacation. I sold them a twelve-hundred-dollar camera; in 1995, that makes it like a million dollars today. At one point, 20 percent of my sales came from friends of Debbie.

My job was to sow, not to grow. So, I talked to Debbie and then I received 100-fold, or more, return.

Do you want to hear another one?

This one is a little rough. There was a big biker dude – he wore a real motorcycle leather jacket; he modified it so that around his left shoulder he had barbed wire. If that's not scary enough, he had a motor cycle helmet that looked like what the Germans wore in the TV show Hogan's Heroes. But, he modified it with, I'm not kidding, with two goats' horns glued to the top. And... yes, there's an "and", he glued teeth from an unknown animal across the front of the helmet in the shape of three sixes. Yeah, he looked scary. He wore the helmet, and jacket, into the store. Again, it was a slow evening and I told my coworker that I'm going to make this guy smile. I walked up to the biker guy and said, well, it's not appropriate for a sermon, but I commented on his horns and ask if it represented how he felt. He looked at me and then gave a big belly laugh. He said, "That's a good one." I introduced myself and asked about his motorcycle (of which I know nothing about bikes) and he was proud to talk about it.

As it turns out, Charlie is his name, is painfully shy. He actually doesn't really like people, interacting with people, or putting up with their "baloney." He doesn't believe in the devil; he just wears that outfit to keep people away. He's an aerospace engineer for Boeing. Can you imagine working next to Charlie – he said he wears that stuff to work. Anyway, he prefers to be left alone. And, he is really into sci-fi movies, surround sound, big televisions and the like. In a short amount of time, he bought some very big-ticket items and kept coming back from time to time to upgrade.

It's the job of the salesperson to sow seeds. A lot of them, over and over again. Salespeople do not know if their seed lands on weeds, or rocks or the path or on good ground. But, if you've been in sales, you know that the only way to find good ground is to sow a lot of seeds. Likewise, if you are in education, or medical science, or in the counselling field, or in management, or

investments, or are a parent, or grandparent, or own a pet; you know that you have to sow a lot of seeds. You also know that the sowing is up to you, the growing is up to someone else.

The parable of the sower tells me that our job as followers of Christ is to love God with all of our heart and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Sometimes that means our job is to smile at people who don't smile back, say hello to people who don't even respond to you, to be kind to others, to forgive others even if they don't forgive you, our job is to do the sowing and that allows God to do the growing.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.