

Pentecost Proper 10A
Peace, Seattle
July 16, 2017
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

WORDS AND SEEDS

Farmer God, you scatter the seed of your holy word into our hearts and lives. You shine on us your compassion; you rain upon us your living water. Sprouts are emerging; plants are flourishing in this community garden called Peace Lutheran. You have given us all we need to produce a bountiful harvest of grace and faith, of mercy and compassion, and for this we are grateful. Use this harvest, use us, to extend your reign. Amen.

Words can be empty or full. They can be ill-timed or well-timed.

Words spoken in anger can hurt and destroy.

Words spoken in love can heal and transform.

When words fall on deaf ears, we say, YOU'RE WASTING YOUR BREATH.

When words are disconnected from real meaning, we say, YOU'RE FULL OF HOT AIR.

And yet, when words, like seeds, fall on the good soil of our hearts, they can sprout and grow and change the courses of our lives.

What are some seed—words that have taken root and born fruit in your life?

**The Scriptures tell us that at the dawn of time God broke the silence with a WORD:
Y'HE AUR—LET THERE BE LIGHT. V'YAH HE AUR—and there was light.**

From the beginning of time one thing has been clear: the words God speaks do not sit idle. God's words are AGENTS—they DO; they BECOME.

They call creation into being; they hurl sun and stars.

They heap up mountains, build glaciers, carve valleys, cut riverbeds. They nourish life.

Isaiah testifies to this Divine power when he proclaims:

AS THE RAIN AND THE SNOW COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, AND DO NOT RETURN UNTIL THEY'VE WATERED THE EARTH, SO SHALL MY WORD BE THAT GOES FORTH FROM MY MOUTH. IT SHALL NOT RETURN TO ME EMPTY, BUT IT SHALL ACCOMPLISH THAT WHICH I PURPOSE; IT SHALL SUCCEED IN THE THING FROM WHICH I SENT IT, SAYS THE LORD.

Oh, to live in such an age—an age when words, bristling with power, shook the wilderness; made oak trees writhe, and mountains skip like a young wild ox. (Psalm 29)

For in our age, words are losing their meaning.

- They stream at us from Internet, TV and radio; assault us as SPAM; masquerade as REAL NEWS.
- Their sheer volume on social media overwhelms us.
- We're surrounded by words, steeped in words...but the greater their number the lesser their capacity for value and meaning.

The words we find in the mouth of Jesus are an antidote to all the trivial and empty words that pile up all around us.

Jesus—whom the New Testament calls THE WORD BECAME FLESH—used words to paint pictures. We call those word-pictures parables, and the 13th Chapter of Matthew is chock-full of them, beginning with today's **parable of the Sower**.

It's a curious thing that we call it The Parable of the Sower, because we usually talk more about the seeds than the one who sows them. Let's have a look at both.

Hold seeds in your hand and the first thing you notice is how small they are—how vulnerable. They're nearly invisible. And you certainly can't tell from looking at a seed exactly what it will become.

But if you're a farmer or a gardener or an entomologist, you know that seeds actually work; that the potential for life exists in each one, written in their DNA. And that given the right amount of sun and water and the proper degree of attention, those seeds will take root and grow and transform into living things.

When I heard this parable as a younger man, I asked myself HOW I MEASURED UP. WHAT KIND OF SEED ARE YOU, ERIK? A GOOD SOIL SEED? A SHALLOW SOIL SEED? ARE YOU IN DANGER OF BEING PLUCKED UP? ARE YOU FIRMLY PLANTED?

With more years under my belt, I hear this story differently.

I realize that my life is not a static, one soil kind of deal. It's much more like a pilgrimage through all kinds of soils and all kinds of conditions.

- There've been times when I've felt stuck in barren, desert soil where no seed could grow.
- And times when I've been placed into the most wonderful dark, moist loam, with a life in me eager to flourish.
- And plenty of in-between times, when the conditions weren't perfect, but were good enough.

What kinds of soil conditions have you been experiencing lately?

Now let's look at the Sower. The parable tells us little about the Sower, but we know this much: The Sower is eager to get his seeds into the soil. Seeds that are designed to produce a good yield, depending on the conditions they confront.

And in order to do this, he's willing to take some risks. He's willing to scatter seed all over in order that some may find good soil and produce. And from what the story says, this Sower—yes, it's God—just keeps on going about this business, casting out seed, the seed of the word, sowing possibilities into the Earth and into our lives.

God knows both the seed and the soil well enough not to expect perfect plants or a 100% return. So a small yield in one season doesn't stop God from sowing seeds again the next.

Like the words which God spoke to create the world, and the **Word-made-Flesh God sent to redeem the world, these word-seeds God is sewing will accomplish God's purposes, and succeed in the thing for which they are sent.**

This doesn't mean that God's word in us won't feel dormant at times, or even absent from our lives. It doesn't mean we won't feel inadequate or even incapable of taking that word/seed into ourselves, much less producing a harvest.

It's at times like these that we most need each other.

We most need to come to worship, to find fellowship and seek the nourishment of the Table; to trace the sign of the cross on one another's foreheads—to remind and be reminded—that the God who claimed us in the waters of baptism will not abandon us to the waterless desert; will not allow our spirits to shrivel and die.

In our tradition we call the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism “visible words.” And it is our conviction that these visible words have the power to transform our lives, to utterly alter our past and our future. For through these visible, living words...

- God speaks welcome—and it happens!
- God speaks forgiveness—and it happens!
- God speaks new life and healing, and they become real.

The last conversations I had with Bob Evetts touched me deeply. Knowing his time was growing short, he spoke not of surface things but of essential things. He looked me in the eye and spoke of love. Bob felt great love and affection for this whole congregation...for YOU.

He relished being part of us! After years of trying out many different congregations, finding Peace Lutheran felt to him like coming home.

This community—you, dear brothers and sisters—were good soil for him, and in his last decade of life, he rooted himself deeply in our community life, and produced 100-fold.

Today God meets us again, just as we are, and casts out his gifts and seeds once more. Hopeful for receptive soil. Eager to tend our growth.

What if, in our approach to ministry, we were as willing to take risks as God takes risks?

What if, in our seeking to be the people of God here where we've been planted, we cultivated such relationships with our neighbors and neighborhood that it became incontrovertibly obvious that this place, this community, could be for others what it was for Bob—good soil?

Since the beginning of creation, God has been casting seed.

And from what I can tell, God won't be stopping anytime soon.

Let's discover the seeds God's sewing here; let's name them; tend them; nourish them.

For when we do, we'll be amazed at how they grow into the fullness of what God intends. AMEN.