

Sermon July 12, 2026

Children's Time

Holy One, we extend our hands and our hearts in blessing over these shawls. These simple threads represent our collective love and your unbreakable promises. We bless them as instruments of your grace. May they bring warmth to bodies and souls. Grant those who receive them peace, healing and love. Amen

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on a path, and the birds came and ate them up. 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. But when the sun rose, they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away.

Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. If you have ears, hear!"

"Hear, then, the parable of the sower. 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. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, 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.

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of this age and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing.

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 Harvest Begins Small

Beloved in Christ,

Today's stories begin with struggle: a family wrestling in the dark and a farmer scattering seed that may or may not take root. These are the stories we need because they tell the truth about how God works: quietly... slowly... insistently through small beginnings. Stories about complicated people and soil that doesn't always look promising.

Isaac, the child born in laughter, has grown up. There is tension in his new family. Isaac and Rebekah rejoice when they learn that their little family is growing, but, before the twins are even born, Rebekah feels the turmoil inside her. She cries out, *"If it is to be this way, why do I live?"* She is carrying a future she does not yet understand. She is carrying a promise that feels like pain. And God answers her, although maybe not in the way she hopes: *There is a struggle inside you. Something is being born that will change everything.*

This is how transformation feels. We experience wrestling and discomfort as something shifts beneath the surface. Sometimes we don't realize how much changes until we look back and see how far we've come.

Jacob and Esau's story is messy. Their relationship is full of grasping, bargaining, and family fracture. But even here, in the chaos, God is at work. Not because the people are perfect, but because **God refuses to give up on imperfect people.**

And several generations later, Jesus tells a story of imperfection and love.

A sower goes out to sow. He doesn't test the soil first or plant only where success is guaranteed. He throws seed everywhere! On the path, on the rocks, among the thorns, and into the good soil.

Here is a story about God's generosity, but it is also a story about our reality.

- ∞ Some days we are the path... trampled, tired, unable to take in anything new.
- ∞ Some days we are the rocky ground... quick to start, quick to burn out.
- ∞ Some days we are the thorns... overgrown with worry, choked by the news cycle and the tensions in our relationships... stretched thin by too many demands.
- ∞ And some days we are miraculously the good soil, open and ready for new growth.

Here is the grace: no matter where the seeds land, **God keeps sowing anyway.**

When I first moved to Maryland, I worked at a small non-profit in Washington DC. I provided programming in DC elementary schools, focusing on the poorest communities. This was a time when resources were stretched thin and the schools I visited suffered the most. One year, the children didn't receive textbooks until Christmas and many depended on donated, used textbooks that were missing pages or were filled with other children's notes and scribbles. I think of the teachers I encountered who keep showing up for students even when the classroom felt like rocky soil... underfunded, overcrowded, stretched too thin. I think of the neighborhoods that felt thorny with fear or grief... of the school grounds that should have been a safe haven but were instead filled with used needles and condoms... and an occasional dead rat. I think of the teachers and administrators and volunteers who showed up... offering compassion even when the path feels worn down by crisis and poverty.

Beloved, today we are called to scatter seeds of hope everywhere! There is no guarantee that every seed will flourish, but Jesus reminds us that some will thrive in the most unexpected places. That is enough to keep going.

God does not wait for perfect soil. God keeps scattering possibility, hope, courage... and trusts that something will take root.

Our harvest begins small. It starts with a seed... something small and vulnerable and easily overlooked. It begins to grow with a moment that shifts everything.... a prayer whispered in exhaustion, a conversation that opens a door, an act of kindness that rebuilds relationships.

God works through small beginnings. During Covid, a California woman posted a question on a Facebook group: "Does anyone need groceries?" This simple question was the seed that grew a multi-community support movement called "Building Up Lives" that provides food, a thrift store and a crisis hotline.

The harvest begins small. But small is never insignificant in the kingdom of God. God works through small beginnings, even when the soil is complicated. Jacob and Esau's are born in conflict but they help make God's vision of a reality. The sower's seeds flung everywhere transformed into a harvest beyond imagination.

We live in a world that wants instant results, but the kingdom of God grows differently. It grows like a seed... quiet, persistent, hidden at first.

We can see signs of new growth all around us. We just need to look!

- ∞ Every prayer shawl knitted in love is a seed.
- ∞ Every food bag packed for a neighbor is a seed.
- ∞ Every child welcomed with joy is a seed.
- ∞ Every person welcomed and affirmed for their own worth.
- ∞ Every act of justice, every word of truth, every gesture of mercy... these are all seeds.

And beloved, God is not done planting. The harvest may begin small, but it never stays small! God is already growing something in us that will bear fruit we cannot imagine.

Amen.