

## **"The Wasteful Farmer and God's Grace"** **Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

### **Intro**

Before I came to Asbury UMC, I served a church in a small rural town in central Massachusetts. Everything was 20 minutes away from the town but Juhee and I enjoyed our serene life there. The parsonage had a big backyard so I was tempted to go about gardening. But I know myself well enough not to do it because I have a really bad black thumb. I could not grow anything, and even worse, plants seemed to die under my supervision. I even killed a cactus once. My friend gave me a small cactus so I put it down at the corner of the window and completely forgot it for many years until one day I found it completely withered. I do not want any more plants to suffer under my supervision, so I didn't try gardening.

After moving to Rhode Island, Juhee really wanted to have a garden so we went to Lowe's and got some garden soil, and fertilizer. We have made our small garden and planted some herbs, cucumbers and of course, peppers. I soon realized that gardening was not easy. Successful gardening requires a certain amount of physical work and commitment. I have to water plants early in the morning and late in the evening everyday. Also, I need to have proper knowledge of plants and flowers. Without this proper knowledge, we can generously give a cactus tree plenty of water with the full extent of our love... and eventually kill it without realizing it. Even raising a cactus requires appropriate care, proper knowledge, and some labor.

Knowing this, it is obvious that large scale farming certainly demands much more energy, care and wisdom. From sowing to harvesting, the farmer needs to know exactly what he or she is doing and how to do it. Without it, a farmer will surely harvest nothing but weeds.

### **1<sup>st</sup> page A Fool Farmer**

In today's text, we see a farmer. "A sower went out to sow," said Jesus. But the farmer in the parable seems to be a foolish farmer or at least not a good one.

He carelessly throws most of his seeds into thorn bushes, rocky places, and busy pathways. What he did was comparable to preparing the garden bed with good soil and then, tossing the seeds onto your lawn, parking lot, and driveway and expecting to have a wonderful harvest! I am not a farmer, but I know that seeds need to be planted in good soil. But this stupid farmer sowed his seed in thorn bushes, a rock pile, and his driveway. The farmer in the parable did exactly what he is not supposed to do.

Some argue that the farmer was sowing seed according to custom, scattering seeds on the ground before plowing. But that was not a common farming practice in first-century Palestine.

We can get our hands on most types of seeds at Home Depot or at the gardening section in Walmart for a couple of dollars. But as we all know, there was no Home Depot for farmers in first-century Palestine. Seed was a precious asset that shouldn't be wasted. Farmers would be careful not to waste their seeds when they sowed. So, what do you think of the farmer in the parable? He was careless, wasteful and even stupid.

This parable of the sower sounds almost as silly as the Christian church sowing seeds of the gospel. We may not have sowed the gospel into the rocky place, but we have sown the gospel in many odd places — from the Green Mountain districts of New England to the jungle in Guatemala. We still tossed God's word to many odd places.

Many Korean churches as well as the United Methodist church support missions to a bizarre, communist country, North Korea — there's rocky soil! But we, Christians, are still

sowing the gospel on this rocky soil. What do you think of it? Does it seem wasteful and even stupid?

Many churches are actively involved in recovery ministry. With hope, we try to sow the gospel to alcoholics and drug addicts. There are thorn bushes but we still toss the seed of the gospel there.

Asbury UMC participates in ministry to the homeless, Project Outreach, and many other types of ministry with hope to spread the seed of the gospel through our action so anyone can hear it. Rocky soil, thorn bushes, busy driveways. David Buttrick, a professor of homiletics, said, “if there’s anything sillier than sowing seed in a rock pile, it’s the Christian church spreading good news of the gospel.”<sup>1</sup>

## **2<sup>nd</sup> page Grace of God**

Who is the fool farmer in the parable? It’s God. God is the fool farmer in the parable. God is wastefully throwing the seed of the gospel to all places and all people. What an ineffective way of doing mission! God doesn’t seem to care whether anyone listens or not. But this is also God’s grace for us. God doesn’t speak only to those who deserves to receive the gospel. God doesn’t reach out only to those who are good enough for salvation. Rather, God tosses the gospel to everyone regardless of who they are. Because God wastefully throws the seed of gospel, we are able to listen to the good news of salvation and become a member of God’s family.

God has also commanded us to do the same thing. You must remember the Great commission Jesus gave to his disciples. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-19) We are commanded to go to every nation and to spread the gospel! God doesn’t tell us the best mission fields to successfully evangelize people. Nor does God recommend any effective ways of going about mission. God just tell us to go and “preach the gospel!” God has not said anything about these practical matters. Some of us may say that I am not a good public speaker. But remember what God said to Moses when he complained that he was not an effective public speaker. God simply said to him, “Speak!”

When John Wesley was reluctant to accept George Whitfield’s invitation for open-air preaching in the field, God called Wesley and said, “Preach.” After accepting God’s new calling, John Wesley *preached in the open air* to audiences estimated in the tens of thousands. Perhaps that’s what God has in mind, for God wants us out of the church building and into the world speaking. God has commanded us to preach the good news — to everyone and everywhere. We are called to speak out and spread the gospel!

## **3<sup>rd</sup> page Results are less than impressive**

But, as we honestly reflect about what we have been doing, results are less than impressive and even discouraging. Right? We have been preaching the gospel for centuries but the membership of the mainline Protestant churches including Methodists continues to dwindle down. According to a poll, 65% of American adults identify themselves as Christian in 2019, which is 10% down from 2015. Many of your children who were raised in the church, do not come to the church. Nowadays, nobody seems to want to hear the gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> Speaking Parables, 67.

Six high school students were interviewed about “why I’m not a Christian.” With the question of “Can you think of anything that would make you seriously consider becoming a Christian?,” one student answered, “I’d visit a Christian church, no problem. But I wouldn’t consider becoming a Christian... because “I really don’t see what Jesus can do for me!”<sup>2</sup> This can be an honest answer for many people. If people are sick, they go to the hospital. If they are depressed, they go to a psychiatrist for counseling. If they need help, they go to a government aid agency. If they are curious about something, they google it today. People don’t see what Jesus can do for them. Can you tell them what Jesus can do for them? Can you tell them what Jesus has done for you and convince them to come back to Jesus Christ? It’s not easy. Because the gospel we preach does not always answer people’s own agendas, people don’t see what Jesus can do for them and they become less interested in the gospel. We preach the gospel but we don’t see much fruit from our efforts.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> page Don’t be discouraged**

So we often become discouraged and even lose our heart for sharing the gospel. When nobody’s listening, who wants to speak? Perhaps that’s what has happened to mainline churches in the United States: because nobody seems to be listening, we’ve quit speaking. We have turned the task of evangelism over to our denomination’s advertising agencies, which spend millions of dollars for Television advertisements each year. We send a fair amount of money to missionaries as a way to comfort ourselves, not having shared the good news ourselves.

However, the truth is that we have not been speaking the gospel. When was the last time you actually talked to your family about the God you believe in? When you have a family gathering, do you share your faith with your family? The First Amendment to the United States Constitution is freedom of religion. In the name of religious freedom, we feel that talking about religion and God to others somehow violates their own right of religious liberty... so we take it off from the table of discussion. When nobody seems to listen and when speaking the gospel seems to be inappropriate, we turn off. Instead of scattering seed of the gospel, we’ve kept our church building well-maintained and check-in on how our church members are doing. How easy it is to become discouraged, to lose heart.

#### **5 Page God takes our foolish leftover, thruway seeds and turns them into triumph**

But don’t be discouraged my friends. God can multiply our thrown away seeds and turn them into a great harvest. At the end of the parable, it tells us about the harvest... the great harvest coming. This is a faithful promise God grants us and this hope in God’s promise is the basis of our mission.

If fact, in Korea we discover that foolish leftovers and thrown away seeds of the gospel have turned into a great harvest. One of the first Korean Christians was Hongjun Bake. Mr. Bake was the son of a merchant. His father often went to Manchuria, China for work, where a Scottish missionary, John Ross struggled to evangelize Koreans for years. No Koreans were interested in hearing the gospel because Christianity was forbidden in Korea at that time. So Ross changed his strategy. Since Korean merchants liked candles, he gave them free candles with one condition: taking a Chinese Bible with the candle. Ross did not know whether they would actually read the Bible or just throw it away. But like a fool farmer, he scattered the seed of the gospel on the rocky soil of Korea.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/iyf/hottopics/defendingyourfaith/?start=16>

Do you know what happen next? Bake's father gave the Bible to his son just to look at what kind of book it was. Surprisingly, Bake was soon attracted to the Bible and made a secret bible study group with his close friends. He studied the Bible by himself for 3 years and decided to become a Christian. He crossed the broader, went to China and received baptism there. Mr. Bake continued translating the Bible into Korean. He also established the first Christian community on the Korean peninsula before western missionaries came to Korea.

Today, about 27% of Koreans identify themselves as Christians. Every week, thirteen-million Korean Christians worship our Lord. Moreover, Korea has become the world's second-largest missionary-sending nation right next to the United States. See. How throw away seeds of the gospel brought forth grain, thirty, sixty, and a hundred times over — a great harvest.

### **Conclusion**

My friends, don't be discouraged but speak the gospel! Trust God who will bring the great harvest and speak the gospel. People tell me that our church needs more young people. That's right. We need them. But we also need older people too. Having an infant baptism would be a great blessing for our church. But isn't it more gracious to have a baptism for older adults who have not known our Lord throughout their lives but finally accept our God toward the end of their life journey?

Everyone needs God and it is our calling to speak the gospel. Even when no one seems to listen, trust God and speak the gospel. Speak the gospel and trust God! Our foolish leftovers and thrown away seeds of the gospel will surely bear fruit, Thirty, Sixty, and a hundred times over.

During the week, I want you to start to share the gospel with people around you, if you have stopped doing this because nobody was listening. You don't have to make them Christians. That's not our work but God's work. But Trust God and speak the gospel. Speak the gospel and trust God! God will be with us all. Amen.