

Community Church of Issaquah

June 11, 2023

## Lessons Learned: The Parables of Jesus

### The Sower

Rev. Vincent Lachina

It's embarrassing for me to admit, but I have what I would call a "black thumb." Unlike our dear friend Jacquie, I have absolutely no ability to grow anything. I wish I had that gift, but alas, I just don't. Don't get me wrong, I love blooming and growing things, and I have tried desperately to qualify as a florist but to no avail. When I buy a plant now or even a bouquet of flowers, I have a practice that I follow. Looking straight at them, I say, "Now look, I'll give you water and treat you well, but if you don't bloom or grow, I have no choice but to put you in the trash." Nine times out of ten, the outcome is the worst, and the trash can has a new occupant. It's sad really. To accommodate for this pathetic lack of skill, most of the plants in my rooms at home are artificial. Isn't that pathetic? That's why I so cherish all the beautiful flowers Jacquie does bring to add beauty to our services.

So, when I was selecting the Parables of Jesus that I wanted to speak about during June Journey, there were so many to choose from and I deliberately moved past the Parable of the Sower for obvious reasons. But as I read and re-read the passages that Duane shared for us today, I was led to understand that there are definitely some

lessons for us to learn in this parable that Jesus shared with the crowd who had gathered from all over the countryside just to hear this teacher or rabbi speak. And yes, I am well aware that as Jesus taught this parable, he was referring to the Word of God as the seed that was being planted. But I wanted to add to that meaning with some practical lessons you and I can learn from his story.

First, let me say, as a strong supporter of women's rights, I have tried to advocate for our sisters every chance I have been given. I was proud to be a collector of signatures for the Equal Right Amendment movement and sad when that failed. When the Southern Baptists voted to revoke the ordination of women pastors, deacons and lay leaders, I raised my voice in opposition and it was one of the many reasons I chose to leave that denomination. So, when I read the first verses of this eighth chapter of Luke and saw the way Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and the other unnamed women were referred to by Luke, I was a bit irritated. His reference to them as having been cured of evil demons was demeaning even though he tried to cover that with the line, "these women were helping to support them out of their own means." The bottom-line lesson in these first verses is simply that women have always played an important role in ministry and should receive more recognition for their work of supporting others using their own means. That is something the church of today needs to honor and recognize.

Then Jesus began to tell a story to those who had gathered. The story was one most of the listeners could identify with – the story of a farmer and his crop. The base of this parable was something those who were there knew well.

Whenever they chose the crop they wanted to grow and harvest, there was always a risk that not every seed would flourish. With that in mind, Jesus illustrated this lesson using four very distinct ways that seeds were either scattered or planted. Those four examples represent ways you and I live our lives though we are likely not farmers.

Lesson One: The first result of the farmer sowing his seed was that some fell on the walking path not the field for growth. Having fallen there, people stepped on the seeds and birds came down and fed on those seeds. In our lives we all plant seeds of a variety of nature as we live our lives. Perhaps it might be a seed of kindness or a seed of empathy or a seed of caring support. The varieties are immense to be honest. The sad part of this scenario is that there are times when our acts or seeds of kindness fall on deaf ears or seem to be a waste of time. Each of us have experienced something similar to that in our own relationships or our life's journey. Have you ever spoken from your heart about your hopes for something, planting a seed of passion, and yet no one seems to listen? Sadly, that was my experience in trying to plant the seed of rightfully treating women in the church, but it fell on deaf ears and even today, my former denomination will not ordain or elect women for pastor, minister or deacon. I like the way Luke tell about those seeds, "it was trampled on."

Lesson Two: When seeds are planted on soil or rock that has no moisture, they dry up and die. As I read this, it dawned on me that there were two parts to the lesson about these failed seeds. First, perhaps the seed was planted in the wrong place either by accident or ignorance. Second, the seed fell on a place where there was no water

or anyone to water them. In life, we often invest our “seeds” in people or in efforts that are the wrong place and when they don’t flourish, it’s sad. Have you had someone in your life that you have dealt with and you begin to wonder if they are in the wrong place? Or have you tried to nurture a relationship that might not be a good choice and feel as if no one is helping you water it? Everyone has experienced that at some point in their life.

Lesson Three: What happens when the seeds of life fall among thorns and those thorns grow better than the plant and the thorns choke it? Most Americans have no idea who Nikola Tesla was. If some would be asked, they might say he was the electric car creator, but that would be incorrect. Nikola Tesla was a scientist from Croatia who actually was the first inventor of electricity. That was a seed he wanted to plant, but along came a man named Thomas Edison who borrowed this idea and became known as its originator. Tesla lost his identity in America and is not a part of our history. He is, however, dearly revered in Europe and in his home country. This might be one example of a seed falling among thorns that choked his life. Though that is a strong example, the same thing happens to us from time to time. We want to plant a seed, but someone beats us to it and our dream or idea or seed just withers and fades away.

Lesson Four: There’s a very positive picture painted when Jesus says, “Other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.” What example would you like to display that shows the truth of this part of the parable? Do you think that the life and work of Community Church of Issaquah might be the

seed that fell on good ground and flourished? I do. The more I know of your history, the more I am convinced that those of you who remain a part of this church are the fruits of so many women and men who came before us and some of you who are here right now. It would be an understatement to say that you have produced a hundred times more than was sown back in 1890 and continues to this day.

And just as this church is a prime example of the parable Jesus taught, many of you are the same. You have planted or sown seeds of kindness, grace, love, and compassion that have grown enormously. If I were to ask what seeds you have sown on fertile ground, could you tell me what the harvest of that would be? You could, but you are too humble and modest to brag about your accomplishments. It is not a negative thing to recognize how what you have planted or sown has come to bring praise to you and to the Lord. Be proud of what you have done. God certainly is!

Last Lesson: As I said in the beginning, I am fully aware that when Jesus was asked what the parable meant, he was blunt in saying that the seed he was talking about was the Word of God. I fully understand that Jesus wanted those listening to understand that when he or anyone else shares the message of the Word of God, it does not always go straight to the heart of someone and immediately transform that person. Like you, when I even stand here or in any pulpit and preach a message about the need to believe in Christ for our forgiveness and salvation, not everyone hears the same message.

When he was alive and the most famous preacher, perhaps you were like me and would watch his crusades on television. His name was Billy Graham. When the cameras would scan the stadiums of thousands of people, I would always be shocked at the size of the crowd he was preaching to. And when he offered an invitation, I was taken aback by the hundreds of people who came forward to accept Christ as Savior. But I was also curious about those who remained in their seats. Did they all not hear the same message? Had the Word of God fallen by the wayside, or had it fallen in a dry rocky place with no moisture, or had it fallen among the thorns? I had no answer to that. But even though he might not have been my model minister, I was thrilled that he has sown seeds of God's Word in the lives of hundreds and the harvest was plentiful.

The lessons for us are broad and open to interpretation by all of us. I have shared my thoughts about how the messages of Jesus's parable of a farmer might also apply to us in our daily life here centuries later. The real message, I believe, is this: God has given you seeds to plant. Where will you plant them and what is your expectation of the harvest or the result of how and where you planted? Let me end by repeating the words of Jesus as he finished this parable. "But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop."