

“Sustainable Sowing”
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Pastor Liz Miller
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I once met a patent agent, someone who is responsible for helping inventors go through the application process to complete the application for their new inventions. What I learned was that a lot of their work was pretty routine and kind of boring, but occasionally someone would come with an invention that was really unique and interesting. This patent agent told me that the wildest patent she ever helped secure was for the Human Free Flight Catapult. It is exactly what it sounds like. The Human Free Flight Catapult is a giant contraption that launches a person into the air in a pod. When they have reached maximum height and speed, they are released from the pod, and they parachute back to earth. There is a second model that catapults people into water. This is a real invention. This was also the conversation when I learned that to secure a patent you don't need a good idea, only an original one.

The image of being launched into the air always comes to me when I start thinking about my reaction to fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and stress. In my desire to quickly move to the other side of whatever is happening, I wish I could be catapulted into the air, over the fear and uncertainty, to the side of safety. Thankfully, the absurdity of this image also reminds me that perhaps this is **not** the best idea. As soon as I start to visualize that *I* am the one being catapulted, I rethink my desire to rush through the hard moments and begin to focus on what I can do to slowly make my way through, feet firmly planted on the ground. Instead, I am reminded that we are called to trust the process.

Trusting the process is a phrase I love because it is something that is so incredibly difficult to do. Whether it is a long-term project that needs to be slowly worked on, a time that is

full of unexpected change, or maybe it is just looking out into the future and wondering what will be in store in five, ten, or fifty years. It is all about trusting the process. It is all about understanding and believing that even if I don't know what is going on, God does.

God is like the earth, tending to the seeds, giving them strength, transforming them into a field of grain so that they might nourish the sower. It's a beautiful, timeless image, because in this parable, we might simultaneously be the scattered seeds, being tended to by our community of sowers, and by God through the earth. We might also be the sower, planting seeds through what we do every day, by those we help, by each person we reach out to, not knowing if it will make a difference in their life or in ours, but trusting that the Holy Spirit is working in us both.

The parable that it takes a combination of different factors in order to produce a healthy crop: seeds able to grow, good soil for them to be nurtured in, a farmer to water and nurture the growth. When we talk about being planted in good soil, it means taking care that we are planting ourselves and our families in places that reflect our values. Nurturing relationships that are rooted in justice and compassion. Feeding connections that value love for all, that make room for other seeds to grow nearby, that honor the diversity of creation.

This act of sowing seeds and being sown is what we do in church each week. It happens when we come with a heavy heart and we ask for prayers, out loud or silently. It happens when the people we are surrounded by, whether in person or in spirit, respond with a prayer, with a listening ear, with a casserole, or with love. Our seeds are sown, and they are tended to. We know that God is working behind the scenes, nurturing our lives, even when we cannot fathom how that is done or cannot yet see the results.

In this parable, we are asked to trust the process. To ensure that we are planted in good soil and then let the work begin. I don't know about you, but sometimes the act of trusting the

process, whatever that might be, especially if it is unknown, and perhaps most especially if it requires both the trust of other people *and* God, is difficult and downright terrifying at times. It makes me want to push right through to the other end to find out how things will turn out, for better or for worse. I just want to know. Will my seeds turn into a bountiful field of wheat this year? Will my prayers be answered? Will my story end up the way I want it to end up? How will that happen?

This year feels like it has been fraught with wanting to make bold decisions, to rush through the uncomfortable parts of our reality, and wanting quick change. This is being played out as schools, businesses, and communities of faith all grapple with how and when it is best to reopen, wishing we could rush through the uncertainty and discernment to reach decision. It is being played out as white people who realize they have not done enough in showing up for racial justice desire bold statements and quick growth. It is being played out in every home as we negotiate how to be in relationships with friends, family, and neighbors in ways that honor the safety of all but acknowledge our desire to be together in person. We seek instant gratification you might get from being catapulted in the air rather than the slow growth that comes from waiting to be nurtured and nourished by the slow process of planting yourself in good soil.

No matter what we do to it, grains like wheat still take at least three months to fully grow. We can't hurry that process. We all we can do is sow the seeds, tend to them, and trust that God is helping them along, preparing them for the eventual harvest. There might be empty promises to speed it up, but growth still requires the proper time to wait and quietly tend, to trust the process no matter how uncomfortable it might make us.

We spend a lot of time talking about the things we do as Christians that define us like speaking out and taking a stand. We spend less time talking about the parts of being a Christian

that don't require much action, but require a lot of patience in the form of faith. It often feels easier to focus on the work of the church or in general being a Christian—active ministry in the form of advocating and organizing, serving in a soup kitchen or going to a book group. These things are important, but they are one part of our faith.

In the background of all that, is the hope, and the belief, that as hard as we are working for God and God's people, God is working in our own lives. Even when we can't see that work, as Christians, we trust that God is present, tending to us, helping us grow in ways that are beyond our comprehension, helping our seeds grow in good soil, taking root in the ground and transforming into a bountiful harvest. This part of our life of faith is a bit harder to grasp, because it isn't always visible, and we don't always have the language to describe what is happening.

Jesus used the parable of the sower to help his followers understand, to keep their hearts grounded in the long game, not the instant rewards. He asked them to trust the process instead of catapulting to the other side, seeking easy answers and quick fixes when what was needed was time and patience. We still have his parable, and we also have one another, reminding each other that even when we don't understand the process, we can trust the process, because we trust in God's love. Knowing that as long as we are planted in the good soil, as we stay true to our values and our faith, we will continue to grow strong and bear fruit. Amen.