

## **Sermon for Sixth Sunday After Pentecost - Pastor Samantha Perret based on Matthew 13:1-23**

Like many of you, I grew up gardening. Mostly vegetables, as there were so many mouths to feed in our home, and my brother would eat the pea pods as soon as they were ready to be picked. We always had cucumbers, squash, green and yellow beans, peas, tomatoes, lettuce, carrots, and potatoes - almost all started from seed. Living in East Berne, in the Helderberg Mountains, the soil was about as rocky as you could get. My mom used to joke that it seemed as if she was growing more rocks than veggies. But somehow, it worked.

We consistently removed stones, weeded, aerated the soil, watered, alternated placement of certain crops so we wouldn't deplete the nutrients, and worked in cow manure regularly - free and local from the dairy farm next door. It wasn't naturally good soil, but with dedication and love, we made it good - we always had a wonderful vegetable garden that helped with a tight food budget.

Now, growing flowers from seeds was another story entirely. Every year we would attempt to make a flower garden for cutting with neat little rows of flower seeds, careful to bury them at the recommended depth and with rows spaced appropriately. Other than bachelor buttons, we couldn't get anything to grow this way. This could be why bachelor buttons are still my favorite flower.

One year, my mom and I just became irritated as we viewed the unplanted flower bed because we had grown weary of watching our hard work produce next to zero results. So we took the flower seed packets, opened them all, dumped them into a bowl, raked the flower bed, scattered the seed mixture, raked again, watered

and said a prayer. We called it the God Garden because it would be only by our faith and the grace of God that something would grow - and that year we had not only bachelor buttons, but we had cosmos, sunflowers, daisies, sweet williams, coneflowers and forget-me-nots.

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus is teaching the crowds using a parable. In this rare example, Jesus even explains the parable for those who are confused by his teaching. We learn about the importance of soil as well as the role of the sower. I think it's a lesson many of us are familiar with.

In the parable, we learn that the sower is frivolous with the grain seeds, scattering them all willy-nilly. You might even say the sower is being irresponsible with the resources. A careful sower would be sure not to throw seeds on the hard path or the rocky ground or areas where weeds can overtake. But the sower is confident that this is the way to plant, giving all soil types a chance to respond.

We see God in the role of the sower, continually offering opportunities for the "bad soil" to try to grow that seed. God constantly offers opportunities for us to learn and reach out to people. Sometimes we are "bad soil" and we ignore these opportunities, or the pressures of the world choke the seeds out, like thorny weeds. But God keeps trying, God keeps throwing chances to learn and grow our way.

We can also see ourselves in the role of the sower. This happens when we try a new ministry and it fails. We threw the idea out and it failed. The soil was not ready. The soil needed to be worked. When I was at Hope Lutheran for my internship, I wanted to start a Community Garden. I was passionate about the

idea and wanted to arrange a collaboration with the Sprout Mobile in Rensselaer to have them distribute our vegetables to hungry people in the city. The problem was, I was passionate, but no one else was. I ended up scrapping the idea before I invested too much time and energy.

I recently spoke with Pastor Pamela Hoh, the current pastor at Hope. She delightedly told me they were going to start a new ministry. They would be starting a community garden. And working with the Sprout Mobile. I may have planted the seed, but the soil wasn't ready to grow anything. It needed to be worked to make it "good." Because sometimes seeds lay dormant until the conditions are just right.

When we are the sower, we need to cast our seeds far and wide, just like God does. We need to tend to the areas of rocks and thorns just as much as the good soil, and have faith that by God's grace the seeds can come to fruition. It is not our place to judge someone else's soil, just continually offering opportunities for community and relationship and sharing the love of Jesus with everyone we meet - not just those who think like us, but EVERYONE. We must have faith that the Holy Spirit is active. That she will blow through the garden, washing soil from the thorny plants, and softening the hardened path.

We can also see how we are soil. Holly Hearon from Working Preacher says, "Soil, like human beings, is shaped by its environment. Good soil must be fed, nurtured by the remains of plants that have come and gone. It must be worked and reworked so that it becomes supple, but not worked so hard that its structure is broken down.

Seeing ourselves as soil involves looking inward. What are we doing to be good soil? Are we listening for God's voice? Are we open to hearing God's word? Are we looking for the signs of God's works around us - to appreciate, give thanks and be spiritually transformed? Are we looking for opportunities around us to serve, to put God's word into action?

When we are good soil, we can grow and flourish and flower abundantly. We need to simultaneously think of ourselves as the soil and the sower. Start out in a good place, receptive to following God's will. Then start spreading seeds far and wide, like the flower garden of my childhood, relying on our faith and God's grace. Finally, like the vegetable garden of my youth, taking a careful look and seeing how we can work more intensively with the soil, helping it to be healthy and able to sustain growth, and produce abundantly.

Lord, let my heart be good soil. And let me be a good sower. All for the glory of God. Amen.