

Sermon Note: Sowing, Seeking, Finding

First Sunday in Lent

Introduction

As we begin our Lenten series *The Last Supper: Conversations That Led to the Cross*, we follow Jesus on his final journey toward Jerusalem—listening carefully to the parables he tells along the way. Bishop Will Willimon, in his book by the same name, calls these stories “riddles,” and insists they’re more about God’s character than our behavior. That’s a more interesting (and more difficult) claim than it sounds. Most of us were taught to read parables as instructions: be a good Samaritan, don’t squander your inheritance, work harder for the kingdom of God. Bishop Willimon invites us to slow down and ask a different question first—*Who is God, and what is God up to?*

This week begins in a field, with a farmer scattering seed with reckless abandon. The seed lands on roads, on rocks, among thorns, and finally on good soil. It’s not a very efficient farming strategy. In fact, it looks a bit careless. But what if that’s the point? This series begins with the parable of the Sower because it tells us something startling: God doesn’t wait for ideal conditions. God’s invitation gets scattered—widely, wastefully, stubbornly—into the most unpromising places imaginable. And some of it eventually takes root. As it turns out, more than enough.

Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iM9pYwXPtqc>

In this clip from *The Blind Side* (2009), Leigh Anne Tuohy spots a teenager walking alone in the cold and, without a plan, turns the car around.

Why This Video?

Leigh Anne Tuohy doesn’t have a plan when she turns the car around. She sees someone she doesn’t know, on a cold night, and she is moved to act. It’s a split-second decision, without deliberation, without a clear sense of where it leads. The scene stands out because Leigh Anne immediately notices that something is wrong, and then acts on it. The outcome is entirely out of proportion to the simplicity of the gesture.

Video Discussion Questions

1. Leigh Anne doesn’t deliberate before telling her husband to turn the car around. When have you acted on instinct in a way that surprised even you?
2. What do you make of the combination—she calls Big Mike out when his story doesn’t add up, and offers him shelter in the same breath?
3. Her family is in the car with her. How do their reactions shape the way you understand her decision?
4. Big Mike says almost nothing in this scene. What does his silence communicate?

5. Leigh Anne offers Big Mike a place to stay without knowing anything about him. What makes that kind of openness possible—and what makes it difficult?
6. If you were in that car, what would have held you back?
7. Her husband thinks they're giving Big Mike a ride. When he asks where they're going, Leigh Anne answers with one word: "Home." What does that one word say to everyone in that car?
8. The outcome of this moment goes far beyond what either of them could have anticipated. When have you seen a small gesture open into something much larger?

Luke 8:5-15 (CEB)

⁵“A farmer went out to scatter his seed. As he was scattering it, some fell on the path where it was crushed, and the birds in the sky came and ate it. ⁶Other seed fell on rock. As it grew, it dried up because it had no moisture. ⁷Other seed fell among thorny plants. The thorns grew with the plants and choked them. ⁸Still other seed landed on good soil. When it grew, it produced one hundred times more grain than was scattered.” As he said this, he called out, “Everyone who has ears should pay attention.”

⁹His disciples asked him what this parable meant. ¹⁰He said, “You have been given the mysteries of God’s kingdom, but these mysteries come to everyone else in parables so that *when they see, they can’t see, and when they hear, they can’t understand*.”

¹¹“The parable means this: The seed is God’s word. ¹²The seed on the path are those who hear, but then the devil comes and steals the word from their hearts so that they won’t believe and be saved. ¹³The seed on the rock are those who receive the word joyfully when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while but fall away when they are tempted. ¹⁴As for the seed that fell among thorny plants, these are the ones who, as they go about their lives, are choked by the concerns, riches, and pleasures of life, and their fruit never matures. ¹⁵The seed that fell on good soil are those who hear the word and commit themselves to it with a good and upright heart. Through their resolve, they bear fruit.

Scripture Study Questions

1. Jesus describes a farmer who scatters seed on roads, rocks, and weeds—not just good soil. What kind of farmer does that?
2. When Jesus explains the parable privately, he says the seed is God’s word. Who is doing the sowing?
3. Jesus says “concerns, riches, and pleasures of life” can choke out God’s word. Are these necessarily bad things? What makes them dangerous?
4. The disciples ask Jesus to explain the parable—the crowds don’t. What do you make of that difference?
5. Which of the four soils do you identify with most in this season of your life?
6. The seed on good soil produces one hundred times more than was scattered. When have you seen something small bear fruit far beyond what you expected?
7. Bishop Willimon suggests this parable is less about us and more about God—about who God is and what God is doing. How does that reframe the way you hear it?

Weekly Action

This week, pay attention to who you pass by. The parable of the Sower isn't just about where the seed lands—it's about a God who keeps scattering it, stubbornly and widely, into unpromising places. When you encounter someone you might normally look past—someone who seems out of place, struggling, or easy to dismiss—resist the impulse to look away. You don't have to do anything dramatic. Start here: *actually see them*.

Then, later in the week, prayerfully consider these questions (write them on a sheet of paper or in a Note on your phone if helpful): *Who did I notice? What did I assume about them? What do I not know about their story?* Consider making this a regular practice to help you see the people in our community.

Prayer

Reckless, seed-slinging God—you scatter your word into roads, rocks, and thorns without waiting for better conditions. Give us eyes to see what you're already doing in the unpromising places around us. And when we encounter someone we'd rather look past, teach us to see. Amen.