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Providence Presbyterian Church
Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 12, 2026
Psalm 119:105-112; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

"Divine Wastefulness"

A third grade class was asked to write a paper for school on "What is a grandparent?" One girl said, "A grandpa is a man grandma. He goes for walks with boys and talks about fishing and stuff." Another said, "Grandmas don't have anything to do except be there." Another wrote: "Grandmas take you for walks, they slow down past pretty leaves and caterpillars. Grandmas never say, 'hurry up.'" Grandmas wear glasses and funny underwear. Grandpas can take their teeth and gums off.

They answer questions like, 'Why do dogs hate cats?' and 'How come God isn't married?' When Grandpas read to us they don't skip words or mind if it's the same story again. Everybody should try to have a grandma, especially if you don't have a TV, because grandmas are the only grown-ups who have got time."

What the kids were getting at with their definitions was "grace." Their definitions of grandparents clearly speak of people who embody grace. Their descriptions point to someone who has the time and the interest to pay attention to them, even though they are little and are sometimes overlooked by other adults.

That's a pretty good definition of grace that certainly mirrors the description Jesus gives us in the parable of the sower. You know the parable of the sower. We all know the parable of the sower. And that is part of the problem. We think we know this parable just because we have heard it before. The old adage that "familiarity breeds contempt," probably should read "familiarity breeds apathy," when it comes to scripture. The more we hear a particular story from scripture, the less likely we are to listen to it for new insights.

So, this morning, instead of allowing our eyes to glaze over, our ears to stop up, and our minds to wander, I'd like us to pay attention to the message of this parable, not because what I have to say is so great but because its message is so profound that if you catch it, really catch it, your week and maybe even your life will be completely changed.

The parable is fairly simple. A sower goes out to sow seeds and scatters seeds all over the place – some on a pathway, some on rocky ground, some among the weeds and some on good soil. All sounds normal to us who don't sow seeds for a living. But to those first hearers, who were people of the soil, this parable would get on their nerves right away. No sower of seeds worth their salt would throw seeds in such a haphazard fashion.

And that, my friends, is part of the point of this parable. We're supposed to notice the wastefulness of the sower. The sower indiscriminately scatters seed on all different kinds of soil, knowing that some, if not most, will not take root.

Nine years ago when we bought our house in Woodland Park, our property had mostly dirt and weeds and very little grass. (Photo 1) I wanted our yard to be rustic but still with native grass to control the soil and limit dust. (Photo 2) I actually thought about this parable and figured if the method of scattering seed was good enough for Jesus it was certainly good enough for me. I bought some high altitude grass seed and scattered it willy-nilly and hoped for the best. (Photo 3) Much to my surprise, some of the seed sprouted in the least likely places. (Photo 4) If I had sowed the seed only where I thought it would grow, I would have a lot less grass today. (Photo 5)

My neighbors may have thought I was crazy just throwing the seed wherever, and letting nature take its course. Nature has prospered most of the seeds I slung that day. Not all grew but enough did to make a difference. Which is part of the point of the parable. This parable demonstrates a kind of divine wastefulness of the sower, whom we assume to be God. And if God is God, then God must know that this way is a better way.

But still it seems so.... random and wasteful. Why does God bother sowing seeds of grace and love in places that we all know will not produce growth? After all, we can all size up certain people and situations as irredeemable. Why does God expend the effort of scattering seeds of promise and hope where they will certainly die? Of course, we secretly think that some efforts of believers is similarly wasted.

Why bother sending supplies and people after wildfires, tornadoes and hurricanes? The next time a wildfire, tornado or hurricane comes along; it'll need to be done again. We question God and we question ourselves about the scattering of seed. Why should we sling seeds when we know that they will fall on dry, rocky ground where they very likely will die? Aren't there enough disappointments and failures in life without setting ourselves up for more? Why does God bother? And why do we bother?

As for God; we know why God bothers: because God is love and grace – sowing love is God's business. The essence of grace is that it is freely given and doesn't have to be earned.

No matter how barren someone's soil may be, they receive God's love and grace in the same abundance as us. As for us; we confess our sin every single Sunday because we know the rockiness of our soil. We know also that we are notoriously bad judges of soil. We think we know one another, but the truth is that we can't tell good soil from bad soil. And even if we accurately assess the soil of another person or situation, we cannot possibly predict how receptive that soil is.

When I go fishing, I'm always amazed to see grass, flowers and even trees growing in the tiniest crevice in a massive rock. Even when I inspect the growth closely, I can't imagine how it could grow in such an inhospitable place. And the same is true of us. Many of us are here only because of the divine wastefulness of God.

When I was growing up, I wasn't a bad person, but I wasn't a believer. I did things my way, which sometimes ended in disaster. If you had known me back then you might have thought it would be a waste of time sharing the good news of Jesus with me. And yet, God continued to scatter seed in my direction, knowing that one day it would take root and grow.

We don't have the wisdom to know where seeds will take root. So, it's best to throw caution and our seeds to the wind and let God work on the growth of love and grace that we scatter.

Another answer to the question of "why bother" is that this is what we are called to do. We are called by God to share the Good News, to embody the gospel in every moment and in every place. If we share the gospel of love only with those we are confident will receive it gladly then we will have neglected part of our responsibility. We need to sling the love of God in a way that mirrors the nature of God - recklessly and with extravagance - flinging it far and wide, letting it sprout where it will. That's the way God works. And that's the way God expects us to work as well. God's grace is for everyone, even those who we think do not deserve it. If we had to earn it, then it wouldn't be grace at all.

In the parable of the sower, God demonstrates divine wastefulness in scattering the seeds of grace even in the least likely soils - which we should have figured out by now is us. So, when you are asked to serve in some way small or large, ask not "why?" Ask instead, "Why not?" Why not join in God's divine wastefulness as we sow grace and love, knowing that God will use our hesitant efforts to grow faith even in the least likely people. God's grace turns everything topsy-turvy - and for us, it's a good thing.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen