
Seed in Hand

**A homily for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10)
by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell
at All Saints by-the-Sea in Southport, Maine**

Last week we talked about the yoke — about walking someone else's pace, a unity none of us built and none of us could build alone.

This week Jesus talks about a different piece of ground.

A field that hadn't been plowed at all.

Someone walks out into it carrying a bag of seed.

"A sower went out to sow."

We know this story so well we've almost stopped hearing it. So let's slow down at the one detail that should stop us cold.

The sower does not test the ground first.

Any farmer would tell you that's foolish. You walk the field. You kick at the packed places. You clear the stones and pull the thorns before you plant. That's what plowing is for.

But this sower doesn't wait for the plowing.

He walks into a field that still has a path running through it, still has rock showing through the topsoil, still has thorns standing above the ground.

And he sows anyway.

Scatters the seed in great handfuls.

Onto the path.

Onto the rock.

Into the thorns.

Onto the good, dark, waiting soil.

Any farmer would shake his head.

The sower never does.

He keeps walking.

He keeps sowing.

We do something different.

We inspect first.

We sort.

We decide who is worth another conversation, another chance, another welcome. We tell ourselves we're being wise. Good stewards. Careful with what has been entrusted to us.

The sower never does.

Some of the seed does not make it. Jesus doesn't pretend otherwise, and neither will I. The birds come. The sun scorches what has no root. The thorns do what thorns do, and something real gets choked before it ever becomes anything.

Not everything planted in us survives what grows up around it.

Watch what the sower does next.

He does not stop and count the wasted seed.

He does not become stingier with the next handful.

He does not begin testing the ground before he plants again.

There is only the sowing.

Then the harvest.

And the harvest, when it comes, is absurd.

Thirty, sixty, a hundred times what was sown.

Notice the order. The largest number comes last. Not because thirtyfold is disappointing, but because every one of those numbers is abundance.

Thirtyfold is not a consolation prize.

It is a harvest.

My wife, Mary Hunter, teaches children using a method called Godly Play. She tells this very story with pieces of colored felt and small wooden figures — a sower, a path, some rocks, a thorn bush, a good field — and then she doesn't explain it. She simply wonders with them.

"I wonder where all that harvest came from."

More than once, a child has answered,

"The birds."

The same birds that carried away the seed from the path.

The children imagined those birds flying somewhere else and, in the ordinary way of birds, dropping that same seed into another field, where it grew after all. Maybe, one small theologian informed her, that's where some of the hundredfold came from.

I don't know that I could improve on that theology if I tried.

We will all spend seasons as different kinds of soil.

Hard as a path some years.

Rocky with the wrong kind of joy in others.

Crowded with thorns that seemed necessary at the time.

We talked about this passage on the porch this week. When I made that point, the person next to me said, "I'm

all of those things in the course of a single day!"

But I don't think that's finally what this parable wants us to notice.

I think it wants us to notice a sower who already knew all of that before the first handful ever left his hand.

And sowed anyway.

Into the path.

Into the rock.

Into the thorns.

Into us.

We are back in that unplowed field this week, still not entirely sure some days what sort of ground we are.

And into that very ground, without waiting for us to prove ourselves worthy soil, someone keeps walking out.

And keeps sowing.

In a few moments, his hands open again.

Not over a field this time. Over this table.

Bread instead of seed. Same open hand. Same ground he already chose.

He is not waiting for better soil.

He is already walking toward you, seed in hand.

Let anyone with ears hear.

Amen.