

“Scatter the Seeds, Don’t Catapult the Humans”

Mark 4:26-34

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Parables were the way that Jesus spread God's word to people. To this day, cultures still teach lessons in ways that are similar to parables. They might start with an analogy that says “this is like...” and then move into an illustration that will capture the lesson or moral. For example, parables are like a children's picture book that uses talking animals to teach valuable lessons like sharing and forgiveness. Parables are like the infamous After School Specials that aired on ABC in the seventies and eighties. These programs were geared towards teens and offered life lessons. For example, the episode *It Must Be Love ('Cause I Feel So Dumb!)* was about what to do when a 13 year old gets their first crush. *A Family of Strangers* was all about blended families. Psst! *Hammerman's After You* taught about bullying. Finally, *Me and My Hormones...* well. You get the point. After School Specials were cancelled pretty soon after that episode.

The After School Specials may seem cheesy to us now, and maybe many of us have never even heard of them before, but they were very popular in their day, and they were effective in reaching out to a particular audience. The lessons they taught about friendship, families and growing older still remain important. The themes are still things that we all need to learn about at some point in our lives in order to better understand the world around us. This is not unlike Jesus' parables.

Parables are stories that Jesus told to people who relished in the art of storytelling. The vivid stories of hidden treasure, a lost son, a Good Samaritan, and even a tiny

mustard seed illustrate lessons of life, community, discipleship, and the kingdom of God. Parables are not necessarily as instantly accessible as they once might have been, but there is still a lot to glean from them. The lessons are still ones we are trying to figure out.

When I hear the parable of the sower who scatters his seeds, not sure of what will happen, until one day the earth produces a crop and the sower reaps the harvest, I am reminded of how we come to be people living out our faith together. The parable of the sower tells us that if we scatter the seeds in our own lives, and tend to them regularly, even if we don't know when or how, we will eventually see results. This parable is about understanding that God is present and at work in our lives, even when we can't see that work.

In short, this parable is about trusting 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 wheat 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. 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 respond with a prayer, with a listening ear, with a casserole, or with love. Our seeds are scattered, and they are tended to. We know that God is working behind the scenes, providing for us, 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. 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?

I have this image that has been stuck in my head of what it is like when we have a difficult time trusting whatever is unfolding or developing in front of us, hoping to find a way to skip the uncertainty and the process we all have go through. That image is of catapulting humans. Catapulting humans is a real thing. I recently met a patent agent, and she told me that the craziest patent she ever helped secure was for the Human Free Flight Catapult. It is exactly what it sounds like. It 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 also a model that

catapults people into water. Again, this is a real thing. This is also when I learned that the only qualification for a patent is an original idea, not a good idea. Catapulting humans: I can't think of any image that better describes the fear and anxiety of wanting to push through the periods of uncertainty and hesitation in our lives. Rather than trust the process, a process that is unknown and maybe more than a little scary, we would like to catapult ourselves to the other side.

Catapulting is dangerous and it is high risk, but it provides the instant gratification that we are used to. Why trust the process when we can fly quickly to resolution? Why scatter seeds when we can catapult humans? Doesn't it seem much more effective? If Jesus wove catapulting humans into his parable, I imagine the sower flinging handfuls of seeds on to the earth and shouting, "Grow! Grow seeds! Right now!" Maybe the reason we don't do that, besides not wanting to raise the eyebrows of our observant neighbors, is that catapulting is not sustainable. How many times can you be thrown from a giant catapult before you get seriously hurt? It might also be a little shortsighted. No matter what we do to it, wheat still takes at least three months to fully grow. We can't hurry that process. We all we can do is scatter 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 wheat still requires the proper time, just the same as humans do, 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. 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 being a part of this church or in general being a Christian—active ministry in

the form of mission trips and book groups, serving in a soup kitchen or serving punch after worship. 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 scatter and multiply, 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 had the parable of the sower to help his followers understand. 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.