

Hopelessly Effective

Matthew 13:1-9

Being a pastor was the last thing I ever wanted to do! In fact, for a long time as a young adult I didn't want anything to do with God. There were too many other distractions. Yet, here I am. Doing this for nearly 25 years now . . . listening for God's voice . . . trying to hear what God wants to say . . . to me, and to you . . . day after day . . . week after week . . .

A sower went out to sow . . . I gotta tell you, if there was ever an efficiency drive at the Palestinian Agricultural Department, this bloke would have been the first to go! He needs a bit of work on his technique don't you think? Just chucking the seed anywhere . . . path . . . rocks . . . thorns! Sometimes he even gets lucky and finds some actual soil! That just wouldn't cut it these days . . . not when you can measure the pH of the soil, get the nutrient balance just right, test the moisture content, set up the seed drill to deliver the seed at just the right depth . . . fire-up the GPS controlled tractor and program the computer to skip over those little patches of ground that are too salty, or too rocky. No, it wouldn't cut it these days.

A sower went out to sow.

Who's this sower? Jesus? Definitely! Me? Yes, I think so . . . but, you too! Jesus tells this parable to his disciples . . . to his disciples whom he later commissions to go to the ends of the earth with the gospel. We are sowers . . . collectively and individually . . . we are sowers . . . sowers of the word of the kingdom. That's who we are. We gather together in this place to be equipped to go and sow.

A sower went out to sow. Jesus is talking about us! Jesus is talking to us!

Which might seem a bit strange given that our gathering place is in the city . . . not many paddocks around here! And I doubt Concordia College would take too kindly to plowing up the oval! Even the suburban house blocks these days are front to back building, and all around us is paving and asphalt. And, as well as that, maybe you're thinking, "I don't know anything about farming . . . or, sowing". Well, that's okay . . . judging by the story Jesus tells of the sower it sounds like you're perfect for the role!

But, spare a thought for me . . . your pastor . . . you might have thought I'm s'posed to teach you about sowing . . . but, I don't know anything about sowing either! Sorry to break that to you . . . you got a dud when it comes to teaching sowing techniques. All I know how to do is to tell you Jesus loves you . . . and to tell you a few stories . . .

. . . there was this woman I once knew. She was a humble woman, who lived a simple life. As was common amongst women of her generation she never undertook paid employment, instead she spent most of her time at home raising her children, physically and spiritually, keeping house and 'supporting her husband' as

they put it in those days. She was committed to her local church, attended women's guild and played the organ and piano for worship until her arthritic fingers refused to play anymore. One day, in her later years, she came home after Sunday worship quite despondent. Her pastor had preached that morning on this text about the sower. When asked why she was looking so down, she said: "All my sowing never came to anything . . . the seed always seemed to fall on the wrong kind of ground . . . I couldn't tell of you of one person who came to faith because of my efforts."

A sower went out to sow.

I don't think hers is an uncommon story. Maybe it's your story too? Did she need to work on her technique, perhaps? Did she need to be better at identifying good soil to give herself a better chance of success? Perhaps she just didn't try hard enough? Was she a failure? After all, we don't live in ancient Palestine anymore . . . there are no shortage of tools and resources and techniques and books and courses . . . there's no shortage of analysis and information. When Nikolai posts this sermon on Spotify this week we can check out the analytics and find out how many people have listened to it, how long they listened for, where they've listened from . . . probably even what they had for breakfast while they were listening!

So, surely with all the information we can gather in this modern world, we should be able to effectively target our message. You would think, wouldn't you . . . then we would just need to learn the right technique . . . or, have right words . . . and we would be effective sowers because we would know what we're doing!

Except . . . there are some things Spotify analytics can't tell me. It can't tell me what kind of soil you are. It can't tell me what's happening in your heart. It can't tell me what the seed will do . . . what the word of the kingdom will do . . . there's a mystery there . . . a mystery no technique can uncover . . . no amount of analysis can reveal . . . no matter how brilliant and perfect the program. Which is why I stand before you Sunday after Sunday, not as some kind of expert . . . just as a sower.

A sower went out to sow. That's it. It's what sowers do. Even in the city . . . even surrounded by concrete and steel . . . even when the ground is hard and unyielding . . . it's what we do . . . you and I . . . in our own way. It might be as simple as saying, "Jesus loves you". It might be just allowing someone else to see that you're human . . . that you fail . . . that you get angry . . . that you are forgiven. It might be standing deliberately with the vulnerable and helpless. I don't know . . . there is no one technique that I can show you, or tell you about. All I know is that there will be a harvest . . . we don't know where the seed might fall, but there will be a harvest. We are sowers.

Like that I woman I told you about earlier. Remember her . . . the one who lamented the results of her witness? Or lack of results! The one who felt she failed. That woman had ten children, one of them was a song writer . . . his songs of faith continue to touch the lives of countless people. Five of her sons became pastors whose preaching impacted on thousands. Three of those pastors served as missionaries in Papua New Guinea; who knows how many people came to Christ through their witness? Two of those pastors became seminary lecturers, sharing their faith with thousands of students over the years; one of them

became vice-president of the Lutheran Church of Australia, and one of her grandsons was, for a long time, the bishop of the SA-NT district. That woman was also my grandmother.

A sower went out to sow . . . as she sowed, some seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. God's word is fruitful . . . there is always a harvest. Let anyone with ears, listen.

Amen.

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