It seems not too long ago I mentioned to some dear friends their need for going to meetings. After listening to how much time they were putting into their new garden. But as I thought about the parable before us this morning I couldn’t help but think I needed to hear for myself the advice I was giving them. The meetings – GA – Gardeners Anonymous – you know like AA is for alcoholics GA would be for those who may have addiction tendencies with gardening. I have lost track of how many gardens I have created at home in the less than 7 years I have been there. Most recently I decided to bury my dog Cooper’s ashes in a lower corner down by the woods – a spot he enjoyed. First I had to go down and clear it all out with my chain saw and the pull out the stumps and make for better soil and get some plants that did well in the shade and then I could take care of his remains. That was followed by a 10 by 12 foot vegetable garden not too far from there.

When I create a garden I think it’s important to create good soil first. I won’t expand on that too much because you will be sending me to meetings! But when the soil is ready – my new veggie garden for example – it’s time for the seeds. Some of the seeds I spread all the seeds in the package in a wide row – peas, swiss chard, lettuce. But the squash and cukes – well, I was pretty careful to only put a few seeds in – interesting too – the cukes I put 6 seeds in a hill but only two came up. What’s with that? It’s the same soil.

What a bizarre thing in the parable. I mean anyone that knows about gardening knows you’ve got to have good soil. This sower takes, what I read, was the scattershot approach to planting seeds. Just toss it out there and of course it lands on all kinds of soil – hard packed soil, rocky soil where there will be no roots even if it did sprout, soil already filled with weeds (which by the way is next week’s sermon topic) and those seeds if they do sprout won’t have a chance of living there. It’s a no brainer that this method is just a waste of seed. And yet, this is how Jesus taught about the kingdom or realm of God.
With stories, parables that said God’s dream for this world is like a mustard seed, a buried treasure lying in a field somewhere, like a pearl of great price, or like a fishing net cast into the sea. And he teaches them sitting in a boat with a whole bunch of people sitting on the shore before him. I loved Barbara Brown Taylor’s reflection when she says that Jesus’ teaching in this way concealed the meaning as much as it revealed the meaning but it very likely was true that’s what kept Jesus out of jail. He could have been arrested for heresy or treason but how could that happen when he was speaking about seeds and thorns and good soil and bad soil? But she says that speaking in this way he knows he’s only speaking to certain kinds of listeners and they are those who listen more with their hearts and less with their minds. If we read the omitted verses in between the verses we have heard we get that. That’s where Jesus says “to those who have, more will be given and for those who have nothing even what they have will be taken away. He speaks of understanding. So for those who don’t get it - he says, quoting Isaiah in those verses: you shall indeed hear but never understand and you shall indeed see but never perceive. But by God’s grace we do “get it!”

So the parable before us this morning – wasted seed. A lot of wasted seed. Typical of any of Jesus’ parables this one is loaded. How do we usually read it? Could be we take the “it’s all about me” approach and we wonder what kind of soil we are. I mean it’s obvious that’s Jesus’ point in the closing verses – we have heard God’s word – what’s happened to it in our lives – are we rocky, weedy, too hard packed? Most likely if we’re willing to give ourselves the “good soil” label – we’ve still come up short somehow – we could be better – and we could play with the fact that the “manure” in our lives, in terms of soil, actually could be to our benefit if we know how important it is in garden soil. But taking that approach we are apt to be focusing on our shortfalls aren’t we? That’s the “it’s all about me” approach.

Another common approach is not to focus on the soil but on the sower – and we know of course that God is the Sower and how very extravagant God is in that sowing just throwing or scattering that seed anywhere and everywhere. That Sower isn’t the least bit concerned about wasting seed – in fact there’s so much that Sower can feed the birds with it and feed the rocks and the hard ground and the weedy
ground while she’s at it. This Sower is not worried about where the seed lands. This Sower is not cautious, is not judgmental, and most certainly not practical – just keeps sowing like there’s no bottom to bag of seed – it would be easy to picture this Sower casting that seed until the entire planet earth was covered or planted. This is focusing on the Sower – we could call it the “it’s all about God” approach.

How about we blend those two approaches and see how maybe God would have us live. If we have heard and experienced the seed – the seed called the love of God, are we not called to scatter it as well? And knowing from whence that which we have received comes, do we need to worry about how much is left in the bag? Aren’t we really free to sow just like that Sower? Do we really need to worry about where the love, forgiveness, understanding, new beginnings, -whatever that experience of God’s grace is in our lives – do we need to worry about where it is going to land. And how many times have we experienced that grace in our lives when we in fact were not the best ground for the seed – those strange and even broken places in our lives, those difficult chapters in the book of who we are when we were hurting, broken, struggling, or whatever – I think we can all remember those times, maybe some of us are even there right now. But that seed of God’s love falls on our ground anyway and sometimes it makes all the difference in the world.

So how do we live having some of that seed in our lives? We keep on keeping on if we’re in that broken difficult place. And if we’ve moved out of it into new life then we have seed to sow and we should sow it just as extravagantly as that Sower does – not worrying about where it’s going to land and not even worrying if we’ll ever know what came of that seed – just let it fly in all we do as part of who we are!

We all have experiences of life with special people in our lives that made a huge difference – and sometimes those people in our lives never do find out what a difference they made. Often when we do find a way to tell them they are shocked. I’m sure there are countless stories to be told right here. That’s what happens when we just let it fly!

So how we live? I think we are called to share God’s love extravagantly. How we live – what we do – speaks volumes. And if we look at the big picture all of us are potential good soil – everyone is potential good soil – so cast your seed!
The harvest? Well first – it’s in God’s hands not ours. But the promise according to the parable is thirty, sixty or a hundred fold. I read that sevenfold would be a good year, tenfold would be abundance, thirty fold would feed a village for a year, and a hundred fold would let the farmer retire to a villa by the Sea of Galilee. But I don’t think we’re talking retirement here – or then again, maybe we are, I don’t know. The possibility is a hundred fold!

The scattershot approach. I like that – it’s not practical – but does that matter really, if we know what we’re talking about? It seems that Sower must have been about the happiest sower around – filled with holy abandon – feeding the birds, whistling at the rocks, picking his way through the thorns, and shouting alleluia at the good soil. (Taylor)

Let those who have ears to hear, hear – and may those who have eyes to see, see. Amen.