This year, when I was planning my flower gardens, I bought a packet of nasturtium seeds. I love nasturtiums with their large rounded leaves and brilliant yellow, orange and red flowers. Since I had just one packet of seeds, I planned very carefully where I would plant them. I followed the recommendations on the back of the package about how deep to bury the seeds and how much space to leave between each seed. Some seeds went in the front of a bed of flowers; others went into two half barrels and a concrete planter. It's been kind of dry here lately, so I've had to water the plants in the containers. Also, I try to pick off the dead flowers after they've bloomed so the plants will yield more flowers. From my first foray into nasturtiums, I've learned where the plants did best, which was in the ground, and how I'll adjust my nasturtium plans for next year. Who knows, I may just go crazy and buy two packets of seeds!

Contrast my careful, stingy sowing methods with those Jesus talks about in his parable. A sower goes out to sow. Apparently, this farmer is kind of careless when he reaches into his bag of seed. Some of the seeds spill from his hands and land on a path, then birds swoop down and eat them quickly. Other seeds fall on rocky ground, where there is just barely enough soil to sprout; the plants start to grow, but since there is no place for the roots to take hold, the plants soon die. Some seeds land in briar patches, where they are choked by the wild plants around them. Finally, the sower's seeds end up taking root in good soil, where they produce good grain, some yielding decent crops and others having phenomenal results.

When Jesus explains his parable to the big crowd on the beach, I suspect some of them do what I, and maybe you, do. I think they probably try to pick themselves out of Jesus' descriptions of the soil on which the sower's seeds land. Am I, are we, the path on which the seeds fall – shallow and offering nothing that would protect and nourish the seeds of God's kingdom? Or are we like rocky ground, open enough listen to the word and agree that it sounds great, yet becoming distracted when something bad or unexpected happens, turning from Jesus to tend to our needs ourselves? Or what about thorny, briar-choked ground? Are we like that, hearing the word, but letting the cares of the world and our desire for worldly success choke out Jesus' call to think more of others than we do of ourselves? Or are we, could we be, the good soil upon which the seed lands – hearing what Jesus has to say, believing it and letting him change our lives, making us grow and flourish until we bear fruit for the world, signs of God's love for all we meet?

How often have you read or heard this parable and wondered what kind of soil you are? Have you wondered how you can go from being barren, rocky, thorny soil to good soil? It's pretty obvious that being good soil is what Jesus wants – for us to be good, productive ground where his word can take root and grow until it bears fruit. How do we do that? How do we make ourselves more receptive to Jesus and his ways? How do we put aside the cares of the world, the lure of possessions and wealth, the things that bother us, haunt us, distract us and weigh us down so that we might be just what Jesus is looking for?

If left to our own devices, it's likely that we would never become good soil, at least not by ourselves. For we are selfish, burdened, tempted – barren, rocky and thorny a good bit of the time. I think it's fair to say that we can be all of the soils on which the seed falls at one time or another. It's possible that we can be all of them at the same time. We hear Jesus, we believe Jesus, we want to be like Jesus, yet we are tragically human, doing, as Paul would put it, the things we do not want to do while not doing the things we want to. Is Jesus' message to the crowds that they are more often than not poor soil, soil on which his message will land and then die? And if this is his evaluation of us, where is the good news in this parable?

The good news comes through the actions of the sower. The sower in Jesus' story is extravagant, some would even say reckless and wasteful. When he reaches in his bag, he pulls out more than he can hold and some of the seed falls on the path, on a paved road, in a parking lot. Nothing is going to grow there but it doesn't seem to stop the sower. On he goes, spilling and casting his seed on rocky soil where its sprouting is a sign of its quick demise. When some of the seed falls on thorny ground where it will surely be choked out, he lets it stay there. Finally, when the sower reaches fertile, rich farmland, he still has enough seed to sow it there. In fact, the sower doesn't ever run out of seed in Jesus' story.

The story is about the lavishness of God's grace, about the sacrifice God has made for us in Jesus, about the ongoing sowing of the seeds of love, mercy and compassion in our hearts and lives. No matter where it lands, Jesus keeps on casting the seed of the kingdom. “I love you,” he calls as he throws out a handful of seed. “I forgive you.” “I choose you to be mine.” “I love you, I forgive you, I choose you to be mine.” Over and over, he casts his love, knowing that sometimes it will fall where it will grow and prosper. Maybe it isn't the most efficient way to farm. Maybe it's extravagant. Maybe it's wasteful, even silly. But it's Jesus' way. His love knows no bounds and has no limits. It can reach anywhere in this world and it can reach all the barren places in our hearts. This is how Jesus works, with an abundance of love that will never run out.

Why does Jesus do this? Because he loves us. He thinks you are worth his continued attention and nurture. Jesus has important work to do through us. He believes his love can find good soil in you and me. Maybe that doesn't happen every time his love comes our way, but Jesus does not give up on us. He knows how hard, stressful and exhausting it can be to be human. In fact, he knows it better than you and I do. Jesus knows how often we mess up as his disciples. And yet still he loves us, still he casts seeds of love in our hearts and he cheers for them to take hold, to grow and flourish.

The world has never known another love like this. It's wild and it breaks all the rules. Jesus has every right to give up on us when he reaches the tipping point, whenever it looks like we're just not going to turn out to be the people he wants us to be. Instead of casting us away and starting over with new disciples, Jesus reaches into his bottomless bag and pulls out more forgiveness, more strength and more love. In his wonderfully inefficient way, Jesus draws us closer every time we wander, reminding us of how precious we are to him, to all who wait to hear about his love. This is the good news of Jesus' parable: Jesus adores us. He loves us without abandon because he thinks you and I are precious. He sees rich soil in us where all we feel are thorns. And he will use the pockets of good soil, no matter how small, to grow in us love and compassion, so that we might actually do something crazy ourselves, like reach out to our neighbor with this love.

So, rugged, rocky, sharp and pointy child of God, allow yourself today to be loved. Listen to the one who finds joy in you, who thinks you're worth all his attention and grace. Laugh when he sows his love in places where you think it doesn't stand a chance.

Thank him for the places in you – in all of us where it takes root and grows. All because a sower went out to sow.

Amen.

*Pentecost 7A*

*July 16, 2017*

*Floyd-Willis Lutheran Parish*

*Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23*