

7Pentecost, Matthew 13:1-9,18-23
Rev. Kimberly Glenn
July 12, 2026

Accept, O LORD, the willing tribute of my lips, and teach all who listen to me your judgments.
Amen.

One of the things I've learned about myself over the years is that God has given me many gifts, and for them I am very grateful. Gardening... is not one of my gifts. My mother has a very green thumb. She must have inherited it from her father who always had a thriving vegetable garden. I must have inherited my gardening skill from *my* father who never so much as ever weeded or mowed the grass, never mind planting flowers. My thumb, unfortunately, is decidedly brown.

Unlike me, there are people in this world who know how to rescue a dying plant using a little water, a little fertilizer, and a few encouraging words. I'm the person who can buy a beautiful, healthy plant, carefully read all the care instructions, place the plant in what I presume to be just the right spot, water it faithfully—and then, somehow, a few weeks later, it looks like a relic from La Brea Tar Pits. I've tried to turn this around in the past couple of years. Right now I actually have three plants that are growing and looking pretty good: a ficus plant that my mom gave me, an African violet that a parishioner gave my husband when he was diagnosed last year and an air plant given to me by a sympathetic parishioner who knows that I am challenged in this area. I am taking small steps, baby steps to become better at it.

I have learned in the process that whenever a plant isn't thriving, one rarely blames the seed. After all, the problem is most likely not the seed, it is the condition of the soil. That's where Jesus begins today's parable. Not with the contents or the intelligence of the seed. Not with the skill of the person who planted the seed. Jesus

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instructs us in this gospel text to consider the condition of the soil. He tells us about four possible conditions of soil where the seeds the sower tosses out might land. Listen to the story as I tell it again.

Let's begin by identifying the sower in this text. Some say it is God. Some say it is Jesus. Since Jesus tells us that He is one with God, does that distinction really matter? I don't think so. I think the significant thing about the sower is that the sower as described in this story knows no bounds. The seeds that are sown are unlimited. There is no one and no place that is off limits for these seeds. The sower sows with reckless abandon. No farmer in his right mind who is concerned about a profit margin could afford to distribute as generously as this sower does.

Next, let us think about what this seed is, what is it intended to become? Some think of it as the seed of faith, but Jesus tells us that it is the seed that will grow and become the word of the kingdom of God. Every seed contains an expression of God's kingdom entering the world. The seeds together contain the gospel, and Christ himself. They contain forgiveness, hope, mercy. They contain healing and reconciliation. They contain the invitation for each of us to become fully alive in God.

Just as every biological seed contains all the genetic information needed for life, God's kingdom seed contains everything necessary to grow a disciple. There's information that lead to the flourishing of compassion, courage, generosity and a sense of purpose. Everything necessary is already inside the seed. The question is never whether the seed is alive. The question is whether the soil that receives the seed allows it to live.

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If those seeds could speak today they might say, "You are loved and you are worthy." "Your worth is not measured by your income or what you own." "Bless those who curse you." "Love your enemies." "Care for the poor and needy." But whether or not those seeds will take root and speak the kingdom of God into being depends on the type of soil into which the seed falls. Some seeds fall onto the well trodden path, on to soil that is packed down and hardened due to constant overwork. Those seeds get trampled on from disappointment, the noise of the internet and social media outrage, or receiving one of life's whammies after another. The seeds bearing the words of God's kingdom can't penetrate that kind of soil. As Jesus says, the evil one comes and snatches those seeds away.

Other seeds fall on rocky ground. These are the seeds that are received with enthusiasm, words of the kingdom that are heard with joy but when the joy and enthusiasm fade, so does the word of God. The rocky ground has lots of glitter and shine on the surface but there is not much depth beneath it. The seeds just cannot grow strong roots. Rocky soil today looks like - church as places of entertainment, sermons that teach the prosperity gospel, or chasing spiritual but not religious highs. When troubling times come along, or when a crisis erupts, the one whose seed fell on that rocky ground quickly loses faith and hope. They slide into depression, anxiety or despair.

The third kind of soil is thorny soil. The thorns in our lives grow fast, they spread quickly and cover up the fertile soil. The thorns choke out the possibility of growing the seeds of God's kingdom. In our contemporary world, the thorns are represented by our

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desires to be busy, our inner ambition to be successful, our obsession with sports and competition and being or having the best. Those thorns don't kill the seeds, they don't get snatched away by the evil one, but there is simply no room in life for them to flourish or grow fully into what God wants from them.

Finally, some of the seeds fall on good soil. Jesus does not call it perfect soil, it is good soil, the soil that God called in the creation story very good. The good soil is turned, it is given nourishment, it is treated with tenderness and intention. Good soil is the soil that bears good fruit - fruit like humility, compassion, forgiveness and generosity.

The question for us today is "What kind of soil are we preparing here at Grace Church for the seeds the sower is sowing now?" Are we the kind church that offers glitzy entertainment or drives ideological division? Are we the kind of church that demands that parishioners adhere strictly to dogmatic requirements? Or are we rather a church where parishioners can ask hard questions? Where doubt is welcomed? Where broken people can find grace and where older people mentor younger people? Are we a church where generosity is contagious?

The hard truth is that churches can become rocky, they can become thorny. And some churches can become hardened. Or, and this is where I hope all of you want us to be, churches can become remarkably fertile. But even if we are able to prepare the most rich and wonderful soil, we cannot make the seed of God's kingdom grow. Only God does that.

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We can be stewards of God's kingdom and prepare the soil as carefully and intentionally as we are able so that children can find room to grow here, those who are grieving can discover hope here and those who are lonely can find community here. Maybe even those who have wandered away from church and even wandered away from God might find the ground softened by the welcome and love they feel here. Maybe the word of the kingdom seed will begin to grow roots by just hearing the spirit filled music that fills this worship space.

The future harvest may depend on us working together to prepare that soil and knowing that we do not do that work alone. We work arm in arm, yoked together with God's grace, Christ's love and the steady, reliable cultivation of the Holy Spirit. May it be so, when the Sower walks through this field again that he might find soil that is ready for a harvest of thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold—not simply in individual lives, but in the life of this congregation and through its witness in our world.

Amen.