

The Sower

Proper 10, Year A · July 12, 2026

Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

“There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Amen.

I’m guessing you remember earlier this spring, those few days when fine yellow dust – pollen – covered everything. At our house, our cars made tracks in the pollen on the driveway. The cars themselves seemed to be encased in yellow. Our deck, our railings, everything was covered in pollen.

So, we swept, hosed things down, and muttered. You remember...

And then we opened our windows, because those were also beautiful, sunny, warm spring days, and the pollen followed. Soon enough, our dining room table... Our kitchen counters... Our bathroom floor... **All** glazed with a fine coat of pollen.

So, we swept, wiped, and muttered some more. You remember.

Today’s Gospel is often thought of as the parable of the soils. But Jesus himself calls it the parable of the Sower. And look at how this farmer works. He doesn’t measure. He doesn’t aim. He throws the seed casually, almost carelessly, as if running out was not even a possibility.

Here’s how Episcopal priest and extraordinary preacher Barbara Brown Taylor describes the sower at work:

“[The Sower] flings seed everywhere, wastes it with holy abandon, feeds the birds, whistles at the rocks, picks his way through the thorns, shouts hallelujah at the good soil and just keeps sowing...”ⁱ

In my mind's eye, the seed is everywhere. But almost before the parable is done, I feel a shift. I lose sight of the seed and start sorting... people. Who's the rocky soil? Who rests among the thorns? Who has taken the comfortable, well-trodden path? And, most unbearable of all, perhaps, what soil am I?

Jesus tells us, in no uncertain terms, that this is the parable of the Sower. Yet I've already turned it into a quiz about soil. This is the same moral arithmetic that had me questioning what the father in the parable of the prodigal son was thinking and uneasy that Mary was being so wasteful with the nard when she lavished it upon Jesus' feet.

Throughout the ages, people have always ranked one another – by blood, border, belief.

By perceived faithfulness to the day's moral code.

By who is human and who we have judged **less** than human – those who haven't *earned* our compassion.

Every age is convinced that they've drawn that line in the right place. That their borders, their definitions, their measurements, even their science, justify judgement, denial, and exclusion.

Our age included.

The author Flannery O'Connor suggests why I turned from the Sower so quickly when she writes:

*“All human nature vigorously resists grace
because grace changes us and the change is painful.”ⁱⁱ*

Do I really want to believe what Paul writes? “*There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” **No** condemnation? If there is no condemnation, what happens to my personal scorekeeping system? My delicious self-righteous indignation? What happens to my private dread that, despite what Paul writes, despite what Jesus offers, I’m actually *not* worthy?

Maybe that’s why the pollen annoyed me so much.

This ancient annual miracle made no distinctions. It never checked the driveway, or the deck, or the table where we eat, to see what they deserved. It came through the open window and settled on the counter, on the floor, on our comforter. It got on everything. It got on me.

The Sower makes no such distinctions either. The seed? It was everywhere. On the path, the thorns, the good soil. All of it. All the same. Extravagantly poured out. With abandon and joy. More than enough. More than imaginable. Never earned.

I wonder what kind of God scatters seed like that.

ⁱ Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Seeds of Heaven: Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 25–26.

ⁱⁱ Flannery O’Connor, Sally Fitzgerald (Editor), *The Habit of Being: Letters by Flannery O’Connor* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988, 307.