

15th Sunday OT, A

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

When you look at your life today, when you look at the lives of the people you care about most; when you look at everything that is happening in our country, what are your deepest hopes?

I am not simply asking what you want, or wish would happen. What things would you work for and do everything you could to make happen? I am talking about the kind of hopes that get ahold of you and would not let go, the longings that drive your life, the prayer that never goes away. I am asking about the things in which you would invest all that you are and all that you have – your life, energy, effort, money, time, and love.

I want you to dig deep within yourself as you answer my question. What are the hopes that seem too good to be true, that bring tears to your eyes, that you may have never shared with another because they were too precious to risk?

Now speak those hopes softly to yourself. Name them. I guess that most of us spoke of a relationship, a quality of life, love, well-being, wholeness, meaning, profound joy, deep peace, forgiveness, and justice.

Whatever you just named, that hope carries the seeds of your life. And it is asking something of you. It is a call and an insistence waiting to be planted and given existence. **“A sower went out to sow.”**

Where would you expect the sower to sow seeds? Where do you want to sow the seeds of your life? In good soil, of course. The answer is obvious.

Sowers sow seeds hoping for and desiring a crop. Sowers want to see growth. They want a harvest. Isn't that what you want when you plant seeds? I do.

When I give myself to another, invest my life in a relationship, or offer my time, energy, effort, and love I do so with the intention and hope that something will come of it. I want my seeds and their soil to be fruitful.

Nobody sows seeds knowing they will not grow, that they will be eaten by birds, fall among rocks, or be choked out by thorns and weeds. And yet, that's exactly what the sower does in today's parable, and I don't understand.

Why does the sower do that? That's the question that kept coming up for me as I sat with today's gospel. Why in the world would sower sow seeds on a hard-packed path, among rocks, and thorns? It doesn't make sense and that makes me think there is more to this parable than we usually see or hear.

One of the usual interpretations of this parable goes something like this. Jesus is the sower. Jesus is extravagantly generous. Jesus sows seeds on every kind of soil and the only question is what kind of soil we are; hard, rocky, thorny, or good. That's certainly a valid interpretation. I have preached sermons like that and you have probably heard sermons like that

more than once. Maybe that's how you have always understood this parable. But not today. I want us to look at this parable in a different way.

For so long I have heard this as a parable about generosity, the sower's generosity. But today I wonder whether Jesus is commending to us the sower's sowing or calling it into question.

At what point does the extravagant generosity of the sower become recklessness? When does scattering seeds here, there, and everywhere become simply going through the motions and indifference to the outcome? What if this parable suggests that the sower is unaware, careless, and oblivious rather than discerning and wise? **“Whoever has ears ought to hear.”**

When Jesus tells this parable I don't think he is talking about himself as the sower. Jesus' life as described in the gospels just doesn't fit with what the sower does in today's parable.

In the parable, the sower sows anywhere and everywhere. But Jesus didn't. Instead, he was always attentive to the openness, readiness, and receptivity of the people he met. He was always evaluating the soil of their life. He wasn't judging and categorizing some as good soil and others as bad soil. He was discerning about which soil was receptive to being sown and which was not yet ready.

When the hemorrhaging woman touched the fringe of Jesus' clothes, he felt her readiness and receptivity to his healing. When he asked blind Bartimaeus, **“What do you want me to do for you?;”** he was asking

about Bartimaeus' openness to change and a new life. When **“many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him”** he saw their unreadiness and asked the others, **“Do you also wish to go away?”** And when he was in Jerusalem for the Passover festival, he did not entrust himself to the people because he knew what was within them, and they were not yet ready.

So, if Jesus isn't the sower in today's parable, who is? We are. You and I are the sowers in today's parable. And every one of us has been gifted with hopes that carry the seeds of new life. You named that at the beginning of this sermon. When you named your hopes, you named yourself as a sower.

At the end of this liturgy, I will say, **“Go in the peace of Christ.”** I might just as well say, **“Go in peace to sow your seeds.”**

So, tell me, where and what will you sow? Don't just scatter your seeds anywhere and everywhere, plant them in people, places, and circumstances that are open, receptive, and ready. Where do you see that? Who are those people and relationships? What do you see happening in our country today that makes you think something new could grow there? The lives of others need a sower with seeds of new life. Our country needs a sower with seeds of new life. The world needs a sower with seeds of new life. They are waiting for you. You are that sower, and your hopes carry those seeds of new life.

“Yet just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful,” so you will make a difference.

My Dera Brothers and Sisters,

If our lives, our country, and our world are going to change, grow and flourish, to become something new, it will be because, and only because, **“a sower went out to sow.” Amen.**