

Peter Wiley
 Matthew 13:1-9
 Hudson
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INTRODUCTION:

According to Doug Hasbrouck, on the family farm of days past, you found a way to make something out of everything – grow a little corn, some apple trees, a few dairy cows and chickens, and cut ice to sell from the lake in the winter – all to make a simple living for the family. Everything made a difference. Everything had a chance to contribute to the whole.

SCRIPTURE: That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying, "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

SERMON:

Listen! Don't just take in a word or two and drift off. Listen and hear. Listen and understand.

That's how Jesus started out as he sat in that boat on the side of the sea. He said listen – even though he knew most of his words would be lost on them. Listen, he said. And then he told a story – a parable.

A sower went out to sow. This early farmer took a sack of seed with him. The farmer took his sack and didn't go and choose the best plot of land down in the valley. The farmer took his sack and didn't go and prepare a piece of land for planting. He didn't plow a field or fertilize it. No holes were dug, no neat rows were created.

No. Jesus said what the farmer did was this: That farmer took his sack of seed and went up high upon the highest cliff. He went right over to the edge. And he looked out at the land stretching out beneath him for as far as the eye could see. Then the farmer waited for a good steady wind. He ripped open his sack and flung it high into the air. And the seed swirled in the wind like little maple seed's with wings.

Some fell straight down deep into the valley below.

Some flew for miles on the back of that breeze.

So it was that the farmer's seed went everywhere and nowhere in particular. So it was that a farmer went out to sow.

Jesus said that most of the seed from that farmer's sack never did take.

Swept away by flowing streams.

Burnt out in rocky clay dirt.

Swallowed by the vines that ruled the ground.

A lot of it became food for the critters that lived beneath that cliff.

Maybe just one in ten seeds found its way from the sack to a place where it could thrive. Just one in ten seeds became a seedling. And a lot of those didn't make it past the first month . . . which shouldn't have been a surprise with the drought that settled in the valley and all the animals that made havoc of the garden.

Perhaps it was that just one in thirty of the seeds from the farmer's sack grew forth like it was intended. That's what Jesus said. He said anyone with ears to hear, listen!

That's a weird way to farm. Just one in thirty! What a terrible waste. Even the high risk investment bankers I know in New York wouldn't take odds like that. Not a very thoughtful use of the seed. A strange way to farm.

But that's the way God goes about God's business. God is like the farmer who chucks a bag of seed in the air hoping at least a little of it will take. Or think of some of the other stories Jesus tells:

- like the story about the laborers in the field and the guy who showed up at the last minute gets paid the same as the guy who toiled straight through the mid-day sun.
- or the story of lost sheep and how a shepherd would risk the whole flock to go after the one dumb lost sheep
- or there's the story of the prodigal son, where the kid who figuratively spit in his father's face is welcomed back home and made whole again.

The Gospel is filled with stories like that. And it's not just about God. Remember the praise given to the woman who gave her last two coins to God. Talk about foolish risk. She had nothing left. No way to eat. But in trust she gave it all. And Jesus said her gift was the best of all.

And it's what Jesus did, too. Like when he came upon those ten lepers. He didn't check them out to see which ones deserved healing or which would be appropriately thankful for his efforts. He just healed them all – even though only one out of ten said thanks. When he was out on the side of the hill with the five thousand who had come out to hear him and they all got hungry, Jesus didn't ask which of them deserved to be fed. No. He just fed them all.

For the life of me I can't imagine that God wants us to do anything less than to use our resources smartly. But . . . but not at the cost of not risking them extravagantly where they just might take hold, because you just never know where that seed might take hold.

Take a walk through Kendall Ledges in the park next door and it's hard not to be in awe at the massive trees that have taken hold on the rocky outcroppings. It doesn't look possible – but

there they are. God threw out the seed and the trees took hold in places we would never have imagined.

The same is true in life for us. Why waste a hundred dollars on the scraggly looking guy who comes in off the street looking for a place to stay. Because, at the very least he needs a roof over his head for the night. But even more, because that night, and that little bit of care and love, might be what's needed to take hold of his life that he might become re-rooted in the world.

When I was in seminary serving as an intern in a church in West Haven, Connecticut, they paid me to run their youth group. There were four kids in that group the first night I showed up and three of them were from the same family. But we stuck with it . . . built it up to seven kids from four families by the end of the year. The pastor of that church was often asked why they were wasting money on a program that wasn't working. And he just kept telling them it was worth the risk.

Well, last summer when I was back in Connecticut, a woman came up to me and introduced herself. She said, *I'm Courtney . . . I was in your youth group. You probably didn't know it, but that group held my life together back then. My parents were getting divorced and I had nothing. But that little youth group gave me the rooting I needed. I don't think I would have made it to where I am today without that group.*

Who knows what will happen if you throw a little bit of seed in the wind.
Who knows what will happen if you take the risk of reaching out one more time to that estranged brother, sister, son, daughter, mother or father . . . to that friend who you think will never be willing to talk to you. Who knows what will happen if you reach out and offer love to the prodigal son of your life again. Who knows what will happen if you invite some stranger or neighbor into your life or ask them to come to church with you. Who knows what will happen if you risk giving a little bit more of your self to some lost cause – to some hopeless case.

Maybe that seed will take hold. Because if you throw it all out there, some will get burned out on the path. Some will get washed away by raging streams. And some will quickly grow, only to wither and die because it doesn't have enough soil.

But if you throw enough out there . . . you just never know where it will take hold. And some of it will come back thirty, sixty and a hundred fold. Who knows what will happen if you sow a little seed.