

Sowing Wildly

A sermon by Jackie Clement

Delivered at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Bloomington Normal, IL

October 5, 2014

The Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:1-9

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ 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. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ Let anyone with ears listen!"

Pantagraph, July 09, 2014

Mary Ann Ford

BLOOMINGTON — Members of the Unitarian Universalist Church in Bloomington have always embraced the seven principles that guide the church but recently decided to step up efforts on the seventh principle, caring for Earth and all things that are a part of it.

"Our goal is to get accredited within our national association as a 'green sanctuary' church," said the Rev. Ruth Gnagey, affiliated minister.

Last week, Hole Deal of Goodfield started the latest effort toward that goal, the installation a geothermal loop system at the church at 1613 E. Emerson St. The congregation approved the \$175,000 purchase in May.

"We probably won't break even, but we'll come close," said Nancy Armstrong, president of the congregation and chairman of the Green Sanctuary Committee. "The congregation voted their values; it's important to us."

Armstrong said the church was faced with replacing the furnace at a cost of \$75,000 or going for the more expensive geothermal option.

"Fortunately, we have go-getters in our congregation," she said. "Some parishioners were very generous."

Sermon

So you may be wondering why I picked the parable of the sower as an illustration for a sermon on stewardship when it is not actually about stewardship. After all, we do not have to puzzle over the meaning of the parable of the sower because, unlike many of the stories in sacred books, its meaning is given straight out. Being the first parable Jesus offers, it is followed by an explanation of parables generally and the intended symbolism of this one particularly. Jesus tells the disciples that the seed sown on the path is analogous to the people who hear his message but do not understand it. Like birds pecking seed from a path, the evil one snatches away what is sown in the heart. The seed

that falls on rocky ground, he says, is like someone who hears his teaching and accept it joyfully, but because the person does not have strong roots he quickly abandons the teachings when challenged on it. The seed sown among thorns symbolizes hearing the message but allowing the cares of the world and the lure of wealth to choke out the words. The seed sown on good soil is the message accepted by those who take it to heart and live accordingly.

So we are given the meaning straight out, and although this is not a story about generosity I would say that it is about a type of stewardship, being a steward of the wisdom you have gained (from whatever source) by putting it to good effect in the world.

Still it seems to me that there is another perspective here. If we are the soil, what about the other character in the story—the sower? It is, after all called the parable of the sower not the parable of the soil. What of someone who goes about indiscriminately sowing in the fields, on the rocks, in the highways and byways? Is that responsible stewardship? Many of us here come from farming communities or are active gardeners. Would you just go out and start throwing seed around with no thought as to whether it lands in the garden or on the driveway? Ought not the sower to show some discretion and discrimination?

I suppose it depends on just what it is he is sowing. If we need to widen our lens to consider the sower we also need to consider the seed. In the biblical parable the seed is the word of God, but if we are to find wisdom in this story for our own time and setting, we have to ask what resources we need to spread around in the world, and in what measure.

There are 2 types of resources we have in our lives - those that are renewable and those of limited amount. Time, money, energy - these are not in infinite supply so we are called to use what we have those to best serve our values. But the resources that are without limit - love, friendship, compassion, acceptance of one another - these are resources we can sow lavishly. Certainly there are times when we must step back to renew them in ourselves, but we do not need to worry about being so loving, so compassionate that we use up the world's precious store. These are seeds we are called to sow wildly.

Even the resources that are in limited supply we are not meant to hoard. We are meant, rather, to use them in thoughtful and responsible ways to make manifest our values. That's what the geothermal system was all about. It was an intentional use of our limited (albeit bountiful) resources of energy and money to protect the limited sources of earth, to create something responsible and sustainable in our own time and for generations to come. These seeds we sow carefully if we are to harvest their greatest yield.

So what of the message of Unitarian Universalism? Which category does it fall into? Certainly a message is of unlimited supply, but it does cost us something to share it ' to print brochures or advertise. Even to share the message in conversation or by inviting our friends to join us at church costs something of effort and risks possible rejection. From a marketing analysis standpoint we should study our key demographics and target our markets, not just go strewing messages of love and acceptance around the world. Or should we?

Unitarian Universalists often make reticent evangelists. Upholding the authority of individual experience and the power of individual conscience poorly equip us to tell others what we have here lest it end up too much like telling them what they should think or where they should be.

That, of course, is not what we want to share. What we should strive to share is the knowledge that there is a place where all are welcome, where they too will find a welcome for just who they are and how they are, a place that will not tell them they are too broken or too doubting or not enough. We should be sharing that they are holy and that there is a community that will recognize that in them. That they have gifts that are brilliant and needed.

One of the hardest things in life is to go unseen, to have your gifts passed over as if they do not matter. It is one of the soul crushing effects of any oppressive mindset such as racism to see other people as not bringing as much light to the world as you do. It is the source of all oppressions and one of its bitterest fruits is when the person being shoved to the margins begins to believe it is true – that what they have to offer isn't enough, isn't good enough or worthy enough. And our culture is skilled at convincing almost all of us that we belong in the not good enough box.

In *The Soul of Money*, Lynne Twist writes...

For me, and for many of us, our first waking thought of the day is “I didn't get enough sleep.” The next one is “I don't have enough time.” Whether true or not, that thought of not enough occurs to us automatically before we even think to question or examine it. We spend most of the hours and the days of our lives hearing, explaining, complaining, or worrying about what we don't have enough of... Before we even sit up in bed, before our feet touch the floor, we're already inadequate, already behind, already losing, already lacking something. And by the time we go to bed at night, our minds are racing with a litany of what we didn't get, or didn't get done, that day. We go to sleep burdened by those thoughts and wake up to that reverie of lack... This internal condition of scarcity, this mind-set of scarcity, lives at the very heart of our jealousies, our greed, our prejudice, our arguments with life (p43-45).

—Lynne Twist, *The Soul of Money*

How many of us buy into that mythology of not being enough? How does that affect our relationships? How does it affect our children and grandchildren? How we hope to nurture them into seeing their own brilliant sacredness if we deny our own?

How many of you were here last week for the Worship Associates service on rising economic equality? How did you feel during that service? Did it touch your heart? It certainly did mine and I know it touched many others. Do you think you could create a service like that? Do you think the people who did create that service are essentially different than you are - that any one of them alone could have come up with the ideas, researched the topic, played the music, delivered the words, run the computer, and compiled the order of service? And then run out to sit in the pews to offer the intimacy of thoughtful reception necessary to create worship? No one person was asked to be

singularly extraordinary, but simply to bring the gifts they possess into community. By working together each bringing their own talents they did, indeed, deliver something extraordinary.

You, too, when you come wholeheartedly to the work have something extraordinary to share. It may not be a full worship service, but maybe it is a reading. It may not be the full funding for geothermal wells, but it might be a part of it. It may not be the voice of a soloist, but it might be a wonderful choir voice. It may not be a water tower, but every drop in the bucket is as important as every other, and as needed.

The other day I had lunch with Gini Courter, former Moderator of the UUA and it reminded me of a story Gini told me some time ago. Several years back, during our sesquicentennial, Gini was invited to lead a workshop and preach here at UUBN. Ed Hines picked Gini up when she arrived at the airport the night before the workshop. Unfortunately, Gini's luggage did not arrive with her. If you have ever seen Gini in action you know that her personality would overcome any circumstance of wardrobe, but she was not delighted at the prospect of representing the denomination wearing the casual outfit she traveled in - a white t-shirt and jeans. Ed assured her that everyone would understand about the lost luggage and it would be fine. Well, sure enough, when Gini arrived for the workshop it was indeed fine because everyone there came wearing a white t-shirt and jeans. This is the kind of extraordinary generosity of spirit that is alive here and that can only happen with the gifts and participation of all. It may not be a water tower, but every drop in the bucket is as important as every other, and as needed.

That is the message we need to be spreading - come as you are; that you are enough, that here there exists a community that recognizes that you are enough, now, in this moment, just how you are today. You do not need to become other than you are to be here, you do not need more stuff, you do not need to get your act together, to do more, to be more. You are enough. The gifts you bring are splendid and needed. You do not need to do everything, to be everything to everyone in order to quiet the voices that tell you otherwise. This is a community that will recognize your sacredness. It is a community generous with its heart, with its time, with its gifts. Some give in great measure, others give more modestly and in different ways, all according to their gifts. All are valuable and all are needed, and all must spill wildly out into the community so that the church not only accepts your gifts but gives abundantly of its own. We've got a good thing going here. Let us rejoice in that and spread it around. Let us sow wildly and without expectation of return.

Namaste. Por lo tanto puede ser.