

Let's Scatter!

[Text Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23]

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Many years ago when I lived in Columbus, my partner Thom and I landscaped our back yard. It wasn't a particularly spacious area, but we did our best to make it look spectacular! We built a deck, put in a pond and fountain, built four raised flower beds and a stone patio. Actually, the patio became my own pet project. I leveled the ground, constructed the frame, and set the large, flat stones into the sand foundation. For me, the really fun part was figuring-out how to get those large, odd shaped stones to fit together as closely as possible - like a giant jigsaw puzzle. [What can I say? It's the simple things that keep us simple people entertained!] Anyway, the yard and the patio turned-out pretty good, except for the problem with the *grass*.

Because of our dogs, we always had a hard time getting grass to grow in our yard; but grass had no problem growing in the sand between the stones. I'd water the lawn and leave the patio completely dry and toasty. However, while that little lawn struggled to survive, the grass would miraculously thrive in those parched little spaces between the stones. I have no idea how that grass seed got in there. And it wasn't like the seed that fell on the rocky ground in Jesus' parable, which withered away because it had no root. No, this stuff had roots of steel, and would hold-on for dear life, in our on-going game of tug-of-war. *Tenacious*, that's what it was! An extremely difficult Life-form to eliminate; yet at the same time, a truly interesting Life-lesson to observe.

It seems that there is an inherent impulse in every living thing, to survive and to grow. In spite of my best efforts to get rid of it, that vigorous vegetation continued to return, again and again. And

since I didn't want to use chemical weapons of grass destruction, I finally just let it grow, and kept it short with a weed-whacker. In the Battle of the Back Yard, the wild grass had won the day. Today's Scripture readings remind me of that pesky, persistent plant. In our Old Testament Reading, the prophet Isaiah paints a fascinating picture of the unrelenting nature of the Divine Word: "For as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout...so shall My Word be that goes forth from My mouth. It shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish what I intend, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

If we consider the Divine Word as a *living* entity - not confined in the words of sacred scriptures, but as the collective, vibrant expression of Divine energy and intention, we may understand how this Word can carry a Life-force of its own. Words *do* have power; and words spoken with deliberate meaning and purpose are endowed with the energy and authority of the one who expresses those words. Therefore, the Word [or Expression] of the Originating Source of all Energy, Matter and *Life* - would be pretty potent stuff! It will not come-up empty, but will - in time - fulfil the intended purpose of the One from whom it emanates.

Now, where this becomes intriguing, and can make a difference in our lives, is when you and I discover what that Divine Word for us might be. Because, as you and I strive to align ourselves and our words with the Holy One and the Holy Word, we become increasingly aware of our own authentic purpose in this world. So, what might that Holy Word - that Divinely Expressed Purpose - be? There are certainly many different dimensions to that Word, and a wide variety of ways in which it might be expressed in our lives. Yet I believe there is one particular focus that is central and universally dependable, when it comes to understanding the essential Divine Intent. In many ways, in numerous places, the Scriptures reveal and affirm that "God is Love." In addition to that

written Word, this is also the primary message conveyed through the person of Jesus Christ - the *Incarnate* Word - the Word made flesh.

The life and ministry of Jesus consistently shows us that the genuine nature and heart of the Holy One, is Pure Love. And I would imagine that most of us, at some time, have sensed the reality of this profound truth. Therefore, as people seeking to live in harmony with the Holy One, the Word that we carry - the message that we live - is a word and message of Holy Love. Now, what this looks like - how we do this - will certainly vary. It is revealed in our kindness and patience, our goodness and generosity, our gracious joy and our inner-peace. The opportunities to express and extend this Divine Love unfold before each of us every day, and in every situation. And anytime you or I treat others with a Spirit of Divine Openness and Compassion, the end results will be positive and productive!

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus reminds us that the reception of that good seed will vary, according to the condition of the soil. Some of that seed will be snatched away; some will wither and fade; some will be overcome by troublesome, thorny difficulties. But that doesn't stop the sower from doing his or her part. The sower faithfully scatters that good seed upon the earth - trusting that it will take root and grow and be phenomenally productive. Of course, the sower has the advantage of assessing the soil by sight. She or he can at least aim for those fertile, receptive areas. But when it comes to spreading the Word of Divine Love to others, you and I can't determine how receptive they will be.

Sometimes, those who seem to be the most hardened and callous, will actually be the ones who are waiting and longing for that Word of Compassion and Acceptance. Sometimes, those who seem to completely ignore our words, will nonetheless be looking at our lives, and will see the Light of Divine Grace shining

through us. So in a way, you and I have the advantage of *not* knowing who will be receptive! Therefore, each person we meet can be the *perfect* person to offer our compassion and care. How that love will effect their lives, may be unpredictable - perhaps we may never even know the end results. However, in our *own* lives, the effect will be absolutely certain; because you and I will be living in harmony with the Divine purpose for *us* - by faithfully sharing and showing Divine Love to others.

In the early 1500's, Divine Love and Grace was sorely lacking in an often power-hungry and corrupt institutionalized Church, and in the lives of many controlling and corrupt clergy. [Thank goodness that isn't a problem today!] One question that bothered many Christians back then, was this: "If this Church in which I was baptized could be so corrupt, and so many of its clergy be tainted, how can I trust that my own Baptism was valid?" Martin Luther, the German Church reformer, addressed that concern with an important theological insight, referred to as "The Efficacy of Word and Sacrament".

Luther maintained that the "efficacy" - the *effectiveness* - of the Divine Word and Sacraments doesn't depend upon the goodness of the person proclaiming that Word or administering that Sacrament. Instead, it rests completely on the goodness and trustworthiness of the Holy One - the One whose Word and Sacrament is being proclaimed and performed. Now certainly, the Church must always guard against corruption and abuse; however, we should not confuse human failings, with a failure on the part of the Holy One or the Holy Word. *Our* calling, is to faithfully communicate and manifest the Good News of Divine Love and Grace. The ultimate results, are up to God.

In a little while, you and I will leave this place to scatter into the world. It's world that is fractured by corruption and violence, hatred and fear; yet a world that is waiting and longing for peace

and wholeness, love and grace. Our remarkable mission is to take the seed of God's Living, Loving Word that we receive here, and freely scatter it among the fertile fields - *and* in those cracks and crevices - of our broken world. We do so, trusting that this seed will take hold and be fruitful and multiply - sometimes in places or people we might least expect. Apparently, there's plenty of this good seed to go around - so you and I don't have to hold back. And according to Jesus, this seed is extremely potent stuff, able to produce thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold! For when those tenacious roots of steel truly take hold, they simply will not let go. Just like that grass in our patio. Just like God's love in your life, and in mine!