

# Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

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Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

## *The Dump Truck of God's Grace*

This passage today is amazing! And here's why...

It describes a sower who is seemingly reckless with the amount of seed he scatters, throwing it not only on the good soil but on soil that even non-farmers like most of us can recognize weren't good bets: thorny soil, dry soil, and even a beaten path. I mean, what are the chances the seed is going to take root in that?

Well Jesus wasn't doing anything as predictable and practical as sowing actual seeds. He was actually trying to plant the Word of God in the unpredictable soil of the human heart. And we know that a "one-size-fits-all" approach to sharing and receiving and experiencing the good news of God's love is not effective. It takes all kinds.

Some people talk to their friends and neighbors quite openly about their faith in God. Others try to show their Christian faith by example. Some leave pamphlets in public places. All of these are ways of sowing seed.

A lot of it will fall in places where it never takes root. Some of it will fall in places where it gets a good start but doesn't last. Some of it will fall in places where it gets choked out by competing interests. That's just how it is.

But sometimes the scattered seed of the Word finds good soil and grows and produces a bumper crop. Perhaps that will be what happens today! Because today we get the good news of the dump truck of God's unending and extravagant grace.

We live at a time and place where it's easy to feel as if there is just never enough: not enough money, or clean water, or fresh air, or fuel, or security, or happiness, or recognition or...

Sometimes this feeling comes from the ads we watch (or are subjected to) via television, radio, and the internet; ads whose purpose is to create in us a sense of lack and inadequacy that only the particular product being advertised can fill.

Or sometimes this feeling comes from politicians who (whether from the left, right, or middle) follow a similar strategy by naming what is wrong, what is lacking, what we should fear, and then offering themselves as the solution to our problems.

And while this strategy is quite effective for both advertisers and politicians, it has the effect of creating in us a profound sense of scarcity and inadequacy, eventually making us believe not only that we do not **have** enough, but ultimately **are not enough**.

Which is why this story of a sower – and by extension God – who scatters seed on all kinds of soil is such good news! God does not hold back. God is not worried about whether there will be enough seed or grace or love. God may want our hearts to be good soil but nevertheless hurls a ridiculous amount of seed even on dry, thorny, or beaten soil.

Goodness, but you get the feeling this God would probably scatter seed-love-mercy-grace on a parking lot! Why? Because there is enough! And, ultimately, because God believes we are enough - in fact, we are more than worth it. We are enough to deserve love, dignity and respect.

I know it sounds like a cliché, but it's true - God loves us just as we are - He regards us as worthy of being showered with His grace. But, loving us **as we are** is not, of course, the same as being content with **where we are**.

Because, while we may wish that we were always "good soil," there will no doubt be times that we are more like the rocky ground or thorns. We're not perfect of course. In fact, today may be one of those days where you feel like you are more of a weed patch than rich topsoil. But still, the sower casts the seeds without reservation.

Can you think of a time in your life when, even though life looked very dim, a word of hope or faith from one person actually made a difference, actually took root and helped you for the better? Well, as followers of Jesus, we are called not only to share God's love where we know it will be well-received, but also, if not especially, with those who are caught in the thorns.

In fact, precisely because God loves us, He wants us to discover the abundant life of trust in Him and love of and service to others.

Precisely because God loves us, He wants us to stand against the fear and scarcity that drive prejudice, racism, greed, and violence.

Precisely because God loves us, He wants us to strive for the equality and dignity of all people.

Precisely because God loves us, He wants us to share what we have generously so all will have enough food and shelter.

Precisely because God loves us, He wants us to grow into the people He knows we can be.

At the close of worship, we'll sing a hymn - one that's new to me, that I found this week. It is short and simple and is a prayer to God in which we open ourselves up to being the person God wants us to be, and inviting Him to make changes accordingly.

Because you never know how YOUR being changed can affect someone else. A friend of mine experienced this just Friday, when she wrote to tell me ...

A family whose home I worked with in Appalachia on my first mission trip in 1987 just contacted me to thank me and tell me how I changed their life. She remembered every one of our names. Funny thing is, that family and that trip, also changed my life and I had just been talking about it an hour earlier with our roofer who thinks he would like to go on one of these trips. When her message came through I got chills. I am so blessed and thankful. In ministry you may not know how what you do makes a difference, but it does!

The fundamental and most important element in all of God's hopes for us is that they all spring from His unconditional, even reckless, love for and acceptance of us right here, right now, just as we are.

God is a giver who gives and gives and just when you think he's all done giving, he backs up the dump truck of his grace and gives you more. (Paul Ellis, *Stuff Jesus Never Said*, p. 24) If you remember only one thing from this morning, let it be the image of a dump truck ...beep...beep...beep... backing up your driveway, with God as the driver, ready to dump even more grace into your life.

There is enough.  
You are enough.  
God will never give up on us.  
God's love is unending.  
Period.

Amen.