

From the Pulpit of Knox Presbyterian Church

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CALLED TO SOW SEED

I Corinthians 3:5-9 Matthew 13:1-9

The “sowing of seed” is on my mind these days. Our community garden site has been tilled and composted and now we are waiting to sow the seeds for a cover crop. A week ago Saturday we canceled our plans to sow that cover crop seed because there was no rain in the forecast. Then it did rain this week, a nice gentle soaking rain. Watching this rain fall on Thursday and Friday was very frustrating for me. Had we missed an opportunity? Now what? When will we sow the seed? I am actually a bit frantic about it. It’s all because I am very excited about the launch of our community garden and want to see it move forward smoothly.

One reason I am excited is that a community garden has been a dream of this congregation for decades. As much as we prayed about the land and even blessed it seven or eight years ago, our prayers were like the sowing of seeds but our seed prayers fell on rocky ground. We seemed to lack the will and the faith to take the next step. Something choked off our dreams. Those seed prayers finally found fertile ground in Ann McClure and through her research work, inspiration, and support we are on our way.

I am also excited because I believe the garden will prove to be a wonderful way to connect with our neighbors. It’s a community garden, after all, and the garden serves as a way to build community. So we will not only be gardening together but more importantly we will be forming and growing relationships with these gardeners. I have already received phone calls from seven neighbors who are very interested in having a plot as well as some of the families and staff of the multi-cultural preschool. And it is not just the relationships we will be growing with these gardeners. The garden will also provide a way for us to nurture the seeds of possible relationships with other neighbors. The garden will be an inviting place, where our neighbors can come and rest a bit, contemplate the wonder and beauty of the earth that brings forth life. The garden will be a sacred space, even more so as we eventually add trees, meditative sitting areas, and a labyrinth for spiritual reflection. I like what George Bernard Shaw once said, “The best place to seek God is in a garden. You can dig him there.” I am also hopeful that the community garden will be a place where we not only grow food but where we sow seeds of the gospel –giving witness to the One who is food for our souls.

I am also excited about our community garden because it serves as a metaphor for our life together as a community of faith. In his first letter to the Christian community at Corinth, Paul affirms that the church made up of God's servants is God's field, God's building. He could just have easily said God's garden. Yes, we are launching a community garden on land that has stood fallow for too many years but Knox Presbyterian Church is already God's building, God's field, God's garden. But we would not be God's garden without the seeds of faith that were sown in our lives by others. So as we literally sow the seeds of a cover crop in the next week or so, this sowing serves to remind us that we are all here in worship this morning because someone sowed seeds of faith in our lives. Those seeds found fertile ground and took root and grew. So I am wondering, who first sowed the seeds of faith in your life? Let's pause for just a moment and think about that. Who first sowed the seeds of faith in your life? In your mind's eye see that person's face, ... look upon that face with love and gratitude... Now turn to your neighbor and share with them saying something like this: "I give God thanks for ____ who first sowed the seeds of faith in my life." Then share a few words about that person. (Pause for sharing.) Thank you.

Sometime next spring the gardeners will sow their seeds, plant their seedlings, and begin to tend and water their plot weekly, all in anticipation of an abundant harvest. This serves to remind us that the seeds of our faith must be nurtured, watered with worship and prayer, study, service, and Christian fellowship. You have chosen this particular garden called Knox as a place to grow in the faith, to be nurtured and encouraged in the ways of grace. How's it going? Has the seed of faith first sowed in your heart produced a green blade of life and hope? Is your faith bearing the fruit of love and righteousness or is it being choked out by weeds – the ways of the world and life's fears and anxieties? Is your faith in need of some particular kind of nurturing so that you can grow deeper in God? I would encourage you to share those needs with me. God's garden here at Knox can only grow more beautiful as you become more faith-filled, more well-watered.

Now the vitality and longevity of God's garden here is not only dependent on us growing in the faith but in each of us being sowers. The ministry of the church is to sow seeds – seeds of faith, hope, and love. Like the sower in Jesus' parable we are to sow seeds liberally and generously so that others are given many opportunities to hear and come to know the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ. If we are faith-filled people, there is always something to sow – a seed of prayer, a seed of forgiveness, a seed of love, a seed of joy, a seed of peace. What seeds is God calling you to sow and in whose life is God calling you to sow seeds of faith, hope, and love?

Now we can't sow seed without watering our own faith, fertilizing it with prayer, and cultivating it with others in a worshiping and serving community. Nor can we sow seed without trusting the growth to God. As Paul proclaims to the Christian community at Corinth, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."

We are simply called to scatter the seed – to love and to serve – and to trust the rest to God. Oscar Romero, one of the great saints and martyrs of the faith, had this to say about seeds and sowing:

"This is what we are about: we plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders, ministers not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own."

We are called to sow seeds liberally and generously and to trust God to provide the growth, to produce faith-filled individuals. Unlike the farmer who harvests a crop annually, we may not see the fruits of our efforts for years, maybe never. In the end, though, the time and dedication will be worth the wait. When we sow the seeds of love and faith, with God's help our harvest will be plentiful. This was brought home to me on Friday evening. I was one of the guests of honor at the Founder's Dinner at the Mendocino Presbyterian Church where I served as interim pastor in 1992-93. Many other former pastors were guests of honor as well, as the church was culminating a year long celebration of their 150 Anniversary.

Mendocino Presbyterian Church was declared a church, duly organized, and constituted in November 1859. The founding members were two men and six women. They and those that followed faithfully sowed the seeds of the gospel in that beautiful, coastal community. Those pioneers in the faith may never have imagined that that the church they founded, the seeds they sowed and nurtured would serve as beacon for God's goodness and grace 150 years later. Throughout this year Mendocino Presbyterian Church has honored its past and the roots of faith that God has grown deep on the bluff overlooking the Pacific. It has also celebrated its future, committing itself look out toward the surging sea, with hope, to hold fast to God's eternal love, and to sow seeds of faith in their community.

Compared to Mendocino Presbyterian Church, Knox at the age of 46 and a half is just a toddler or teenager in the faith. As we commit ourselves to generously and liberally sow the seeds of the gospel in our community, to tend and water those seeds, and trust God to provide the growth, this community of faith called Knox will reach its 50th year. By then the field that has laid fallow between here and Stony Point Road will be teeming with life and beauty. It will give testimony that Knox Presbyterian Church is indeed God's garden. Like sunflowers with heads turned to the golden sun we are people who rejoice in God's light and love for us in Jesus Christ and will ever sow seeds of hope, faith, and love for his glory and praise.

Alleluia! Amen!