Everyday Evangelists—Mt 13:1-9, 18-23

So, who is the sower? I’d sort of like to know. It’s the sower that gets things started, casting that seed in the first place. Some people say, well, the sower is God. Yes—I can see that. God certainly broadcasts His Word; however, I think there are some additional possibilities for the identity of the sower. If the sower sows the seed of the Word, if the sower reaches in and lets the Word go wherever it will, then the sower could also be Jesus, for Jesus is certainly sharing the Word with everyone, everywhere. Sisters and brothers, we, also, are the sower. The Church is the sower, and each member of the church, each of us, is also a sower.

It’s one thing to see ourselves that way. It’s one thing to know that we are called to be sowers of the Word, sharers of the Word, broadcasters of the Word. It’s another thing actually to do that. In principle—in principle, we are all expected to be evangelists: not like Billy Graham or Luis Palau, but everyday evangelists. Everyday evangelists are people like me and you. Everyday evangelists are alert for opportunities to share the Word with others every day.

You might think, then, well, everyday evangelists must be pretty unpopular! When Devon and I lived in Corpus Christi, we got a double-whammy—we could count on fairly regular visits from the nice Jehovah’s Witness lady, who would not only leave several copies of the *Watchtower* in the laundry room of our apartment complex, but would also occasionally knock on doors to hand deliver a copy.

We could also count on a couple of visits a year from teams of two clean-cut young men, wearing white shirts and ties, who wanted to share about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints—Mormons, in other words. Now if I, being a Christian already, sort of tried to hide behind the blinds or be as far from the door as possible when the knock came, how much less of a hospitable welcome those evangelists received from others who were not Christian! And yet, every now and again, I am sure that someone listened receptively.

Think what you will of Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons—we see these groups out proclaiming, sharing their version of the good news. When is the last time a Presbyterian evangelist came to your door, or tried to contact you in *any* way? I have great admiration and respect for those Jehovah’s Witness and Mormon missionaries, because they are doing what all of us should be doing every day and almost every day don’t.

Now, in one sense, the expectation that we will be evangelists every day is not fair. Here in Delavan, we know (many of) our neighbors and have known many of them for years. We’re not as young as we once were, not as healthy. We don’t have the energy we once had. Maybe we don’t even have the enthusiasm we once had, the joy in the Word that we once had. To say, then, be an evangelist every day is not quite fair.

But being an evangelist, beloved, an everyday evangelist, is not just a matter of walking for block after block, knocking on every door. An evangelist, a sower, is alert every day for opportunities to share the Word. Maybe an opportunity doesn’t come along on a particular day or even during a particular week, but the sower—that is, all of us, we Christians here—the sower is alert for opportunities. God will let you know. Be willing.

You may think, well, that soil there doesn’t seem very promising, so I won’t bother wasting any seed there! You may see all those stones and think, hmm, no, not there. You may see all the crabgrass and purslane, mallow and stinging nettle, and shake your head and walk on by. Is that what the sower of the parable did, though? In one sense, I suppose, the sower was rather foolish, because the sower cast that seed, letting it fall where it would. The sower didn’t discriminate, didn’t evaluate the apparent quality of the soil: the worthiness of the soil. The sower sows the seed everywhere, so that everyplace—everyone—has the opportunity to receive the Word.

And this is just what Jesus is telling us in this parable: sow the seed, the Word, everywhere, as opportunity comes to you, and do not bother to judge the quality of the soil. It’s as if we sow blindfolded, as if that is just the way God wants us to sow, which makes no sense from an agricultural point of view—our farmers are thinking, what a waste of good seed!

But this is where the farmers have to work against their instincts, against their knowledge, against their experience, and instead trust, have faith, and be willing to be surprised—and so do the rest of us.

In hindsight, of course, we see that we are good soil, but let’s not congratulate ourselves too quickly. In God’s eyes we’re still pretty poor, not great material to work with. We all still need a lot of improvement. As He works us, He still turns up a lot of stones. He gets us all weeded and comes back the next day only to find the crabgrass and purslane springing up and spreading. If it were you or me cultivating that patch, we might just give up, but God doesn’t give up. If it were you or me sowing the seed, spreading the Word, we might just throw up our hands and be content to sit quietly in our homes. God didn’t do that. God threw out his arms and is now cultivating His Word in us, patiently, persistently, carefully, diligently, lovingly. He wants us to be sowers after His own example, after His own sacred heart, every day.

He gives us seed, ample, plentiful, abundant seed: His Word, the good News of peace, grace, and hope. He knows that, as we cast that seed here and there, some of it will fall on the hard-packed earth of the path, the hardened heart. The Word won’t penetrate there. We try to share the Word, and it is as if we are speaking a foreign language. We try to talk about grace, and what they hear is guilt. We try to talk about faith, and what they hear is boredom.

We try to share our joy, and they yawn. They don’t get it; it doesn’t make sense to them. They don’t think about things that don’t make sense to them.

God knows that, as we cast seed here and there, some of it will fall among the rocks. The rocks can be a problem, but it’s the shallow soil that’s the real trouble. We try to talk about love, and some hear that word love, and they just love love, love to be in love, but what they know of love is what they’ve been shown on TV, in magazines, and on the internet. The excitement, the drama, the rush of emotions, the sweet discoveries, the ecstasy! And then comes the prospect of the long haul. That first flush, that initial rush, begins to change, to mellow, to grow, and they think they must be falling out of love, and all they want is to always be falling in love. It’s not love if you’re always falling, beloved, because love, real love, actual love, always puts us more firmly on our feet. Real love digs deeper into us, and finds the soil we weren’t aware of, the good soil we never suspected was in us: God’s love finds it.

God’s seed, God’s Word, is meant to take deep root in us, in our lives, and the world will seek to uproot that Word, because the world regards that Word as a weed. Someone or something is always coming along, trying to pull that Word out, roots and all. Each of you can tell me about something that came along in your life that pulled pretty hard on God’s Word planted there in your heart. Maybe, for some of you, that Word has never been quite as full, quite as healthy, quite as fruitful, since. But the Word is still there, growing, tended, alive.

God knows that, as we cast the seed, His Word, here and there, it will also land among thorns, weeds. You know, it’s not only God who cultivates His Word in us: He calls us to be gardeners under Him. We’ve all gone by homes with beautiful lawns and gardens, truly picture-perfect, and we’ve all gone by homes that are half buried among weeds run riot, homes that look as if no hand has touched any part of them in years. And then there is the rest of us, with lawns and gardens that are . . . maintained: not overrun but maybe not quite flourishing. We’re not most of us too caught up by the cares and pursuits of this world; neither are we quite as immune to these as we would like to be, as God calls us to be.

Many of us probably know people who seem more caught up in the cares and pursuits of this life than is healthy for them. Getting that new truck, getting that big house, getting that promotion, getting that raise, keeping up with their friends who have more money, takes up almost all their energy, all their time, and all their interest—not to mention all their money! They dream about more money. They talk about more money. They plan about more money. They would tell you that all they really want is to enjoy themselves, they live to have fun, but their lives are lived in the service of money. And money is a thorny weed, indeed, and most of us have been pricked at one time or another.

And God does not say, well, don’t bother, there. God does not say, you can safely pass that one by. The sower scatters the seed, so that the seed falls everywhere. We are sowers. God is calling us to be sowers. We do not know just where the seed of the Word will fall; God is not asking us to become occupied by that: our occupation is to scatter the seed of the Word. We do not make the seed quicken or grow. We have been given the seed, and we give the seed. We are alert for opportunities to sow seeds. It’s pleasant to sit in our yards and doze in the warm sun, and it’s a joy to share the Word. We may not have an opportunity to sow seed every day, but we are everyday evangelists, seeking opportunities every day to sow the seed.

We are all unlikely evangelists. We are all evangelists. We may not look like promising material; we really weren’t promising material at all, until the Word was planted in us, watered, fed, and cared for. You and I are the ones in whom the Word has taken root, taken root despite the hard-packed places in our hearts, taken root despite the stones and the weeds. And there are many, beloved, many others who also do not look like promising material to you or to me, yet God knows the great promise in them, and God has a great promise for them, and God calls us to help Him to plant that promise in heart after heart, trusting in His promise, trusting in His Word, trusting in Him.

And to Jesus Christ, who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests of his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.