

2nd PENTECOST – PROPER 6 June 14, 2009
the Rev. Ken Kroohs
([Ezekiel 17:22-24](#), [Ps. 92:1-4 & 11-14](#); [2nd Corinth 5:6-17](#); [Mark 4:26-34](#))

SCATTER & SOW

St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, High Point, NC

MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH ... AND THE MEDITATIONS OF ALL OUR HEARTS ... BE ALWAYS ACCEPTABLE TO YOU --- OUR STRENGTH AND OUR REDEEMER AMEN

I always title my sermons although I usually do it after preaching. It seems somehow, that you – the congregation – frequently change the emphasis and importance of what I say. Frequently, as I preach, the stress moves to a point other than the one I planned.

But today I titled the sermon before the first word was written. It is titled: "Scatter and Sow". I doubt you really noticed those two words. They seem, at first, to be verbs used out of necessity and to have little real importance in what the gospel is telling us.

Which, interestingly is both true and false! The words "scatter and sow" are of little importance except to move the story along and they are central to the entire passage.

You see, this passage has a dual focus. Most preachers today will focus on God's role and in that "scatter and sow" are of little importance. In most churches you will hear the very important message that this lesson is about how God provides ... how God does what is essential ... how it is God's work.

The farmer does not grow the crop – the farmer was, and is, incapable of growing the crop no matter how we phrase it. Only God is capable of making the seed sprout and grow. So Jesus says the farmer only

sleeps and rises and waits for the crop to grow - waits for God to do what is important.

Jesus knew that was not fair to the farmer! As those involved with our community garden will tell you - the farmer must work hard to help ... not make but **help** the crop to grow. The farmer has to loosen up the soil by tilling. The farmer provides more nutrient for the crop through fertilization. The farmer makes sure the crop gets enough water, and not too much water. The farmer works hard!

And yet ... the farmer's work is secondary to God's work. The farmer's work will not produce a crop unless God makes the seed sprout and grow.

In most churches today the focus, the very appropriate and important focus, is on God's work.

I want to focus on the farmer ... on us. Because our role is also important. As the saying goes: "Without God we cannot, without us God will not". God's role is essential. Our role is voluntary - but in a strange way equally essential. Because when we will not - neither will God.

God's wants us to be involved in God's work. I frequently think God is a bit crazy to have set things up that way! But, that is how God set it up. God wants us involved in God's work.

Rather than stepping in and doing it when we fail, God allows the task to go undone.

A powerful story goes that a young boy with great faith was in a refugee camp. The boy was slowly starving but kept saying that God will provide. As the boy slowly starved to death people kept ridiculing him, asking "where is your God?". The boy responded that God had provided but the people God

had told to share the food had failed to do so.
..... ouch.

Another story that just hits home is about a monk who dreamed he had died. When he reached St. Peter he was told to go into a room and God would come in and ask one question. The monk began to panic - what would be the question? Capital punishment? Mary's virginity? Abortion? The bodily resurrection? ... As the monk grew more and more afraid of the question he noticed that the room, in the way of dreams, was both very large with thousands of seats and yet very intimate. He noticed that most of the seats were vacant and assumed they would wait until the seats were full but all of a sudden, God was there. And God was crying. God looked at each vacant seat and in a tearful voice asked the monk: "Where are the others? Why didn't you invite the other people?"
..... ouch.

Scatter and sow. The farmer may depend on God for the crop to sprout and grow but first the farmer must scatter and sow.

We must depend on God for the wonder and joy of God's kingdom, the reign of God to appear but first we must scatter and sow. Before God will deliver, we must do our part.

.... I can be a fairly critical analyst. I want to know what works and what doesn't and am very willing to cut out what doesn't. So when we, St. Christopher's, do things to invite other people I want to know they work. So it bothers me ... well it use to really upset me that when we do mailings or special events or whatever and make a real effort to invite people, we seldom see any of the people we invite. BUT - inevitably - inevitably we see new people.

That upsets my sense of cause and effect, and business analysis but this gospel lesson tells us that if we do the work to prepare the soil and then scatter and sow, God will provide the result even if, in our case, it is not what we expected. Its as if God says to us that we will see a result of our efforts but the result will be such that we know who REALLY provided.

The point is that we need to focus on our role whether it is feeding the hungry or helping people grow closer to God or something else we need to focus on our role and let God take care of the result. When we become too focused on results, we tend to forget our role. It can be as if the farmer prepared to harvest but never planted the seeds.

So what are our roles? How do we "scatter and sow" to make possible God's harvest?

Most of the answer is to focus beyond ourselves. I am a sincere believer that God created us in such a way that we will notice and respond to the needs of others – when we look. I am also a sincere believer that one of evil's greatest tools is "distraction" – to keep us focused on ourselves so we do not look up. And we become convinced we will look up later, once we take care of us and ours. We become convinced we are doing "enough". We become convinced it is really everyone else's role and responsibility.

I doubt I provide money to one out of twenty requests for help we get at the church. I tell them about Open Door and West End and United Way – but don't give them any money because I know that many are a con job.

But each time I do say "no" I am reminded that Jesus never set a "needs test" on the people who

approached Him and yet there is no record of anyone being turned away.. You know there were plenty of wealthy people in the 5,000 He fed. You know some of the people Jesus healed had created the problem through the way the lived and yet there is no record of anyone being turned away.

The difficulty, and the way evil mis-leads us, is when we spend more energy looking for reasons NOT to help, then helping.

How often we say "religion is a private matter" and yet over, and over, and over again people have said they would like to attend church but no one has invited them and told them about their church.

People want to be told about God! And if they ask a question we cannot answer a perfectly good, in fact wonderful response is: *"That has always bothered me too. Let's go talk to someone about it."* What better way to both respond to the asked question, and simultaneously to the unasked question: "Is it OK I don't know everything? Is it OK if I have doubts?"

Or consider the three opportunities this congregation is taking on. I am intrigued by how, unintentionally, we are responding to three distinct groups.

The Open Door has many people who will soon get a job or better job and be able to be independent again. But a big part of their clientele are the long term homeless. Those who for psychological or whatever reasons, probably will never be independent – will always be homeless. Jesus would approve of helping them.

The Interfaith Hospitality Network serves another group. These are families who are moving toward

independence and need that little extra help for a while. Jesus would approve of helping them.

The community garden will contribute at least part of the harvest to the West End Ministries for distribution through their food pantry. Many of these are elderly people living in the network. People who may be on government assistance but do have a home. People who are simply trying to get by from week to week. People for whom a week without the food pantry could be a major problem. Jesus would approve of helping them.

Add to those outwardly obvious ministries the quieter ministries of looking for ways to invite people to grow closer to God with us. To journey with us as we seek to know God better.

In all those cases: the person waiting to be invited to church, the person wondering about God, the long term homeless person, the family on the edge of independence, the elderly person barely getting by - --- in all those cases we don't solve a problem. All we do is scatter a few seeds and give God the opportunity to act.

..... You know, as I reflect on that on scattering a few seeds and allowing God to act It makes me ever more aware ... painfully aware that if the harvest is not being provided it is because we did not scatter and sow.

But more importantly, as I reflect it feels really good. It feels good that it is not ultimately our job. It feels good to have God as our partner. It feels good to know that if we scatter and sow, God **will** provide the harvest.

If we plant the tiniest of seeds God will provide a harvest so magnificent the birds can find shade in its branches.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN

I would enjoy reading your comments about this sermon. Please feel free to discuss content or presentation. Send your comments to *ken@st-christopher.com*