

When it comes to gardening,
I have a black thumb.
Pastor Dave is the green thumb in our family—
If you've been to his office,
You've seen his array of plants displayed in his window.
He cares for them,
Waters them,
Ensures that they are thriving.
If you give me a plant,
It will eventually wind up in Pastor Dave's office.
In Raleigh, where we used to live,
He resurrected a Christmas cactus that someone had gifted me,
And I had, sad to say, completely neglected.
It bloomed every year under his care,
And people at our previous church would come by to see Pastor
Dave's beautiful Christmas cactus every year.
At our new house in Forest Park,
There was already a built-in indoor garden in our basement.
One of the first things Dave did when we moved in was buy some herb
and tomato seeds to plant in that space.
And while he's been in Slovakia,
I've had strict orders to water them and be sure they are getting
maximum lighting.

So maybe it's not a black thumb, I have,
Because that would require my thumb actually doing something,
Like watering!
It turns out that I just kinda forget about my plants.
It's horrible but it's true.

I love them, I do,
They're beautiful!
But it seems I'm destined to ruin them.

So Jesus' parable this morning about seeds and their growth,
Or lack thereof,
is relatable for me,
and it is also full of good news for us.

Because if we look deeper—
Not just at the different seeds falling onto rocks, or thorns, or an
open path.
We see the sower,
who is actually dropping seeds all over the place.

Indiscriminately,
Not particularly,
The sower lets the seeds fall all around even as he sows in
the field that is prepared for them.

And this, to me, is the beauty of this parable—
That God, the sower,
Continues sowing a Word of grace and mercy and
redemption despite the condition of the ground,
Despite the condition of our hearts.

Because at one time or another,
Or perhaps more often than not,
Our hearts aren't fertile ground for God's sown Word.

Our hearts are hardened,
Burdened,
Weakened.

Our hearts are vulnerable to the lures of the world,
Which peck away at the Word that has been sown,
Much like the birds do to the seed on the open path.

Our hearts are restless,
Unable to center and root in the promises of the Word sown,
Much like those seeds that fall on rocky ground.

Our hearts are jealous,
Selfish,
Judgmental of both others and of ourselves.
And the Word that is sown gets choked and stifled,
Much like those seeds on thorny ground.

But if we only focus on our hearts,
Or the seed that doesn't make it,
Then we miss the point.
We miss the sower's abundance of seeds in the first
place.

Yes, we do pray for our hearts to be good, rich soil that receives the
seed of God's word with trust,
And openness,
And faith,
And understanding.

And we also pray for the times when our hearts are far from good soil,
That at those times,
We might trust in the gift of the seed that has been sown,
And most of all, trust in the Sower,
who continually chooses to scatter the seed on
our sinful hearts, anyway.

As we hear in Isaiah,
The Word of God does not return empty.
It can't.

The Word of God is not only sown by God,
But is watered by God,
Fed by God,
Sprouted by God.

Not by us.
And it's going to grow.
God makes sure of it.

As Rowan Kyle is baptized this morning,
We (will) hear water poured,
Cleansing her from sin and death forever,
And also watering the seed of God's Word that is
planted in her heart today.

A seed that will most certainly encounter rocky ground,
Thorny ground,
Temptations that will pluck away at it throughout her life.
But the seed is sown.
It's there.

There's nothing little Rowan can do about it.
There's nothing any of us can do about that seed planted within our
hearts.

Nothing except trust in the water that flows,
The sun that shines,
The good, rich soil that God nurtures when we can't.

As we come forward with hands open to receive the bread and wine,
With mouths open to taste it,

With hearts open to take this gift,
The seed of God's love in Jesus Christ is being sown
literally within our bodies.

There's nothing we can do about it.

Except trust in this fertilizer, of sorts,

This feeding of the Word,

The sun that shines,

The good, rich soil that God nurtures when we
can't.

Whether it's my black thumb or just an unexplainable forgetfulness
when it comes to caring for seeds in the earth,

I seem to suffer from being a negligent plant caretaker.

But if God has chosen to sow the seed of God's Word into our sinful
hearts,

To water that seed,

To feed that seed,

And, when we inevitably forget to water and feed it
ourselves,

When it surely dies from our sin and neglect. . .

God has chosen to resurrect that planted
seed,

Bring it to new life,

Turn the soil,

And give it another chance
to thrive. . .

If God has chosen to do all of that,

Then even a black thumb,

Even our darkest hearts don't stand a chance when it comes
to the abundance and persistence of God the Sower.