

Westgate Baptist Community 10 July 2005

## **God's Extravagance**

by Geoff Wraight

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 - The Parable of the Sower

### **Intro:**

Read Alan Marr's story about the prayer research.. (*The Witness*, July 2005)

Now if we were to take the economic rationalist approach to our faith - then based on the research we would have to do some more investigation to find out how many prayers were enough to make a difference. Then, we would need to make sure that we allocated the minimum number needed to get God to act then distribute these to greater number of people in need and thus bring the cost/benefit ratio down...etc..

I have a hunch that the Christians who buy into this kind of theology would feel very uncomfortable with today's reading out of Matthew. In fact, it would probably be best if they didn't read it at all..

Because the Parable of the Sower is all about being caught up in the extravagant grace of God..

Imagery of abundance and extravagance dominate the details of both parable and interpretation.

I sowed some lawn seeds the other day in our backyard. I tried very carefully to follow the instructions on the box. I prepared the soil carefully, added the required amount of fertilizer and sowed the seed in the exact quantity per square metre making sure that none of it was wasted on the rock boarder or garden bed. Then... I prayed that over the next six weeks God would make it rain every three days in the evening for one hour and then bring sunshine the next day. This would ensure that my

lawn would grow and not be dependent on my self-discipline and legendary attention to detail...

This is not the kind of seed sowing described in this story.. Instead, the very act of sowing in what some might say is a reckless fashion, letting seeds fall where they may, hints at the generosity and abundance of God's grace.

The theme of abundance finds its way from the text into our lives. What God provides is more than needed for "sowing" the gospel.

The differing soils in the parable imply we cannot guarantee results in every act of ministry – in every act of grace and kindness done in the name of Jesus.

Why?

Positively, God will bring the growth. Negatively, some will not respond.

Life with God always remains invitation, not imposition. The call to follow Jesus is not like an order from the captain to be obeyed – it is a gracious invitation to be caught up in the work of God's grace and love in the world. What the parable invites is our openness to God.

The promise of the parable is simple: life with God flourishes when word of that life is received.

Yet the parable recognizes the complexity that not all respond in the same ways. We see that truth in life as well as scripture.

Different life experiences open people and close people to the presence of God. Even different times in the same individual's life make one more available to or sceptical of that word of grace. Mystery exists in the gulf between hearing the word, understanding it, and doing it.

But that mystery is firmly grounded in the promises of God...

The words out of the mouth of the prophet Isaiah speak of the life of God's words and the ultimate purpose remaining with God...

*My words are like drops of rain in the cycle of nature:  
 wherever they fall they give life;  
     they replenish, renew and nourish life,  
 and then the earth gives them back and they start again.  
 My words always achieve their purpose;  
     they flourish where I plant them,  
     .they nourish all who feed on them.*

The "word" is sown to bring God's unexpected, abundant harvest where it is welcomed. Commentator Tom Long says, "Therefore, the church is called to 'waste itself,' to throw grace around like there is no tomorrow, precisely because there is a tomorrow, and it belongs to God" (Matthew, Westminster John Knox Press, p. 151).

Extravagant sowing. Unexpected, abundant harvest. God provides for life by word and Spirit graciously given. God's grace, however, allows our freedom. We can be receptive. We can be closed. How is it with you? Where do you find yourself and your church most receptive to God? What remains hard ground?

We are about to embark on another part of an adventure here at Westgate. We are about to appoint a Youth Worker based entirely on the generosity of a group of people here who believe that to sow grace in the hearts and lives of the young people of our multicultural community is an important response to God's invitation. We have pledges amounting to nearly a two day per week position. We have an experienced and highly gifted young woman who has agreed to come and fill this position. I would love to see the full amount reached from the word go and I think we can easily do it but we are not quite there yet.. If you haven't yet pledged there is still time, if you have its time to fulfil your promise and maybe even increase it..

But what I think is critical in this exercise is that we do this in the spirit of Matthew 13. We give with abundant generosity – we trust God that the seeds of faith we already seeing grow, will bear much fruit. But we will respect the freedom of hearts and we will keep giving..

## PRAYER

How do you find us, O God? How readily do we open ourselves to your words, to your Spirit? Help us to trust in your abundant love. Help us to sow graciously and freely, as you have already done with us. Open our senses. Open our lives. Open us individuals and as a community. To you. Amen.