

“Listen! A Sower Went out to Sow”
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A sower in the early 21st century went out to sow. He had a successful agribusiness. He had well tilled fields, on land that had been prepared for planting. He had fields with regular boundaries, of an optimum size for the crop. He took a seed drill to put in one seed every so often in ruler-straight rows. He had irrigation and fertilizer and an automated tiller to deal with the weeds between rows. He thinned the crop so the best specimen could grow to full maturity. He kept careful records. What a smart efficient cost effective farmer.

Now when God sows seed the picture is entirely different. This is the old-fashioned broadcast seed method. Take a handful and toss it out. It lands where it will. There are no boundaries, no carefully prepared ground. The whole world is the field.

The rain and snow fall indiscriminately on the earth. Everything is allowed to grow. Nothing is thinned out and discarded. When the harvest comes in, there is great rejoicing. It doesn't matter if there is a hundred-fold return, sixty:thirty or ten percent. The harvest is the harvest and there is going to be dancing and partying and rejoicing all over the place.

What a God we have. What an impractical, indiscriminate, wildly generous God, flinging the seed of the Kingdom far and wide. The whole world is included. There are no boundaries. One day, who knows, even the desert might spring into bloom.

Listen a sower went out to sow.

It's a good thing we are not in charge. We would never organize the kingdom like God does. And thank goodness. If we were in charge of the rules, probably we wouldn't even get into the kingdom. You see, we do not have an orderly self-respecting God here at all. And thank goodness. We do not have a God who is concerned about boundaries, about rules, or about right answers. God scatters seeds with indiscriminate abundance, without even looking to see if the seeds are likely to grow where they land. Our God sends rain and snow on everyone without regard to merit.

When Jesus walked on earth he was always running into the authorities of his day. He was always knocking heads with authoritative people who wanted to put fences around God's kingdom. Authorities who wanted to limit who could come in, authorities who wanted to judge people on the basis of their merits, people with authority who wanted to judge others on whether or not they were likely to produce a good crop of righteous deeds.

If we know this God, if we have experienced this God who invites each one of us to the table to be fed and loved and forgiven, then we will want to be sowers as well. We will want to welcome everyone to the table and we too will want to sow the seeds of love

and faith indiscriminately. We will want to be the sowers who share generous and loving grace without rules and without boundaries and without looking at merit.

I read two articles recently that made me think hard about how difficult it is to do this. We each want to be responsible citizens. We vote, we read the newspaper, we discuss the pros and cons of the war, but sometimes it comes down to something simple like sowing the seeds.

Lt. Col. Jim Coen commands the medical unit that flies the injured in and out of Iraq and Afghanistan. "We are a mixture of National Guard and Reserves; in my unit we have cops, we have firemen, and we all love doing it." The unit flies out of Travis Air Force Base to Iraq or Afghanistan. On the return flight they bring wounded and ambulatory wounded to Ramstein Air Base in Germany, and then back to the United States. In Vietnam it took an average of 22 days to get a wounded soldier home, today it takes an average of 72 hours for the wounded to be back in the United States.

Capt. Erika Cisneros from Los Angeles is an army nurse in Germany. "When they get to us they are still scared," she says. "The first thing we tell them is that they are still safe. They are in Germany and they are going home. We listen. We give them as much time as they need to be angry or be sad. And we help them through it. We had a patient who had been heavily sedated. He had come back from Iraq. He kept asking me if he still had his legs. He wouldn't look. He wouldn't look down. He must have asked me 17 times and I had to tell him every time that yes, he had lost his legs. That was a year ago," Capt Cisneros says, "and I sometimes say to myself, why do I keep doing this?" She answers her own question, "Because I can help."

Col. Dunn is 56, and is a critical care doctor in the Air Force Reserve. He was too old to join, so he had to get a waiver. In his other life he has a private practice in Redwood City and is on the staff at Sequoia Hospital. He went to Stanford Medical School. He has a lot of credentials. "But that is nothing" he says, "compared to the honor and privilege of helping 18-25 year olds who are the boots on the ground." For two months on this deployment he has flown once a week from Travis to Andrews Airbase every Sunday night and then on to Germany. Monday, they fly back to the states with the patients. He says he sleeps on the floor of the plane when it is east bound on its way to Germany and works all the way back to the states on the westbound flight. He has crossed the Atlantic more times than he can remember. His patients don't know him. "They are in very bad shape," Dr. Dunn says, "You take them to a larger hospital where the technology and care will be good and they will be near their families. We are one link in a chain of survival."

Lt. Col. Coen, unit commander, in his other life is a personnel analyst for the city of Los Angeles. "We are not here to argue the policy or the worthiness of the war," he says, "I don't think arguing about the war is helping. Helping the kids who got hurt is the mission."

These people are surely sowing the seeds of love and service. Without much recognition and at great personal sacrifice, they are indiscriminately helping those that they can; those who are in need. There is no judging people on the basis of their rank or ability or what they are apt to accomplish in life. Instead they are responding to the call to help.

President Obama recently called for a draw-down of troops in Afghanistan. He hopes to bring all the troops home by the end of summer of 2012. Some people are in favor of it. Some are not. My sister-in-law is 82 and lives in a small town called the Dalles in Washington on the Columbia River. She stood on the steps of the post office for 7 years every Friday night for seven years with a sign with a small group of 7 to 12 people to faithfully protest the war in Iraq. My niece's husband just retired as a captain in the Navy. He served a year's deployment as second in command at Guantanamo Bay. He and my niece are very active in their home church in Providence, Rhode Island. They also attend a Quaker meeting that is about an hour from their home when they have the time. He recently retired to teach 8th grade math, but while he was on active duty he taught at the war college in Providence. You can just imagine his dismay when he was suddenly called and deployed to be second in command at Guantanamo Bay and to be in charge of all the military police on the post. Military officers are not allowed to share their feelings about choice of duty with anyone. So even the family was only requested to imagine how he felt. While he was in Guantanamo he gave a talk to all his MPs each week. His talks were more like witnessings. He e-mailed home his witness to the troops each week. They were passionate to please to honor and respect all people, even their prisoners. He brought the Koran over and talked about how important it was to respect it. He himself spent an hour inside a cell to understand what it was like. He had each of the MPs spend an hour in the cell so they could understand what it was like to be on the other side. He made unannounced spot inspections day and night to make sure his rules were carried out. He insured that prisoners were treated with justice.

I served in the American Red Cross in military Hospitals during the Vietnam war years and I spent the whole year of 1969 in a military hospital in Vietnam taking care of the wounded. My family has stood on differing and opposing sides of war policy, but there is one thing we have always been united on and that is supporting and responding to the call to help wounded people no matter where they are and no matter what side of the war they served on.

We too are invited to respond today. Perhaps it is a small and simple way.

Listen a sower went out to sow. Wherever we are, however we are called. Jesus calls us to sow seeds with love, to sow the seed generously regardless of merit and without worrying about the harvest. Amen