

# Sermon for Sunday, July 12, 2020 - "Extravagant Joy"

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, Iowa  
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Did you catch all the joy in the scripture readings today? These texts are overflowing with just extravagant rejoicing. There is abundant joy busting out all over the place.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims to the people living in exile, "You shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

The Psalmist praises God saying, "You make the dawn and the dusk to sing for joy. May the meadows cover themselves with flocks, and the valleys cloak themselves with grain; let them shout for joy and sing."

Paul proclaims good news of great joy to the Romans, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

And Jesus tells a vast crowd a parable about a sower who goes out to sow. This sower flings seeds everywhere with joyful abandon, and they bring forth an incredibly bountiful harvest.

All this exultation may seem a little disconnected from the challenges we are facing today. How can we rejoice as the pandemic surges, as loud, angry voices rage, as people prioritize their own comfort over the common good, as racial injustice persists? Extravagant joy and delight feel out of reach and a little inappropriate, maybe. We've got some big issues to address after all. Our Gospel reading today does paint a vivid picture of our human challenges. We've got a lot of hard, thorny, and rocky soil within us. The conditions are not so good for growth and change.

Evil and sin eat away at the truth and it doesn't flourish in our lives. We hear a summons to justice and receive it eagerly, but it doesn't really take root. As soon as something hard is asked of us, we turn away. We want to do what is right, but the cares and lures of this world are persistent thorns that block our growth.

The landscape is pretty bleak. When you look closely at the human condition, there's not a lot of cause for rejoicing. There's much that can lead to despair, judgement and anger - at ourselves and others. So, we better get to work digging and fertilizing and tending the soil to try to improve ourselves and others, right? We should attack those thorns and clear out those rocks and not be afraid to get our hands dirty. Maybe, but as anyone who's spent time gardening or farming knows, soil can't make itself into good soil. It can't weed out the thorns or clear away the rocks within itself. Soil can't just pick up and move to a less trodden path.

The good news is that this parable isn't instructing us about how to be better soil. It isn't telling us how we should improve the landscape around us. This parable is about Jesus, an extravagantly generous sower who scatters seed with abandon. This sower flings the seed of God's word everywhere - the word of justice and mercy, challenge, forgiveness and love, the word that changes lives and brings new life.

This sower doesn't storm around angrily declaring, "You better clean up your act if you want any hope of change." He doesn't shake his head muttering, "Can you believe this thorny, rocky, shallow soil?" The sower doesn't even do a careful analysis of the soil to determine where the seed has the best chance at growth. Common sense would say you shouldn't sow seed on the path, or the rocky or thorny ground. You should conserve and be frugal and sow just enough seed only on the good soil.

This sower approaches the human landscape very differently. He goes out walking, sowing seeds everywhere. Author Debie Thomas has helped me to picture this extravagant sower, Jesus.<sup>1</sup> She writes, "Imagine it — a sower blissfully walking across the fields and meadows, the back alleys and sidewalks, the playgrounds and parking lots of this world, fistfuls of seed in his quick-to-open hands. There is no way to contain that much seed. No way to sort or save it. Of course, it will spill over. Of course, it will fall through his fingers and cover the ground. Of course, it will scatter in every direction. How can it not?"

The good news is that this marvelous seed, the seed of God's word, does work change. People are changed, we are changed, when we hear of God's love, God's mercy, God's justice, God's welcome. This good news of great joy matters in the world. "God's Word will go out from God's mouth and accomplish what God purposes for it, no matter where it lands ... God has an endless ability to soften hard ground, clear away rocks, and cut through the most stubborn of thorns to make way for a harvest."<sup>2</sup> God is at work in the soil of your life, in the soil of our world to bring growth.

With such an extravagant sower flinging this good news everywhere, we can let go of our own despair at the human condition. We can instead practice abundance and joy. Debie Thomas writes, "How I wish that the Church was known for its absurd generosity. How I wish we were famous for being like the Sower, going out in joy, scattering seed before and behind us in the widest arcs our arms can make .... How I wish the people in our lives could see a quiet, gentle confidence in us when we tend to the hard, rocky, thorny places in our communities, instead of finding us abrasive, judgmental, exacting, and insular. How I wish seeds of love, mercy, justice, humility, honor, and truthfulness would fall through our fingers in such appalling quantities that even the birds, the rocks, the thorns, and the shallow, sun-scorched corners of the world would burst into colorful, riotous, joyous life."<sup>3</sup>

Beloved of God, we do have hard work to do in this world. Yet, we also have an extravagant sower who scatters love and forgiveness, joy and abundance freely and fully into our lives, into your life. When you consider the landscape and are tempted to despair, fix your eyes on the sower and rejoice. Open your hands, lift up your heads and bask in this joyful abundance. Let it flow through you to this world God so loves.

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<sup>1</sup> The Extravagant Sower by Debie Thomas posted on JourneywithJesus. net  
<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay?id=2687>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.