



Sermon preached at the Sunday Service of Holy Communion, Tenth Triennial Gathering (2017), Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Wisc.

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Good morning, sisters.

Good morning!

And I guess we have a couple of brothers here. Let's not leave them out.

So, listen. I tell you what, I am so excited to be here. This is my fourth triennial, and I love the energy that we have. We've had an awesome week; haven't we? Some good times! I was thoroughly excited when Linda Post Bushkofsky called me and invited me to come and preach today. I said to her lucky for you that's what I like. That's what I like. Ha-ha! Let me tell you something, ain't no party like a Holy Ghost party because a Holy Ghost party don't stop! A wise woman once said, "I am so excited, and I just can't hide it. I am about to lose control, and I think I like it."

So as you can imagine, I was so anxious about what the passage was going to be. I called Audrey, I bothered that woman, I said what is the text? What is the text? What is the text? So she tells me it's Matthew 13 whatever. So I rip my Bible open, I am flipping through, I get there, and I see the sower and the seeds, and I was like (snoring).

You all know I got to come out; right? The sower and the seeds. All the miracles in the Bible. All the wonderful things that Jesus has done, and I get some crazy farmer?

I mean, can a sister get a miracle? Can a sister get a miracle?

So you know, I looked at it again because maybe, you know, maybe I misread. Maybe I transposed some numbers. Maybe I was in the wrong book altogether. So I looked it up again. Sure enough, it's still the sower and those seeds.

So I shut my Bible, I put it down, I backed away, and I looked it up one more time. Still the sower with those sad seeds.

So I said now, Lord, you must be trying to tell me something, so what I am going to do is I am going to start praying all anew, God, you give me new eyes, new ears so I can see what you are trying to say to your people. So I had to take another look. Incidentally, just by way of a disclaimer, if I say anything that offends you or makes you angry, it's Linda's fault.

She the one who invited me. I was minding my own business.

Trying to get right with the Lord. Probably studying for a Bible study, and she called me, so if I say something too crazy, it's her fault.

So what do we have in this passage? We've got us a sower, we've got some seeds, we've got soil, we've got a harvest. So now what I like to tell people in my home congregation is when Jesus is speaking or when Jesus is doing something, it's very important that we look for the scandal. Oh, yeah, I said scandal. Oh, let me tell you, we serve a scandalous God. Jesus did things that upended all of history. That's changed the course of this world. You don't do that by keeping people happy. And just so you know, you all aren't going to have to say amen because you know how some people sing in the shower, I preach in the shower.

Sure do. Preach right on to myself. Preach myself right happy, so you all don't have to say amen. Some of you might not be able to say amen. You might just have to say ouch.

So theologians debate about what this harvest means, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty, some say it's a bumper crop. Others say it was mediocre. And I don't think that's the point. I think the point was that there was a harvest at all. I think that's where our miracle starts happening. They made a sister work for a miracle in this one. That's where one of the miracles takes place is there is a harvest at all because what God chooses to do, as the creator of the universe, God chooses to use the terrain of our hearts to be part of the creation. Receive that for a minute because, sisters, I want to tell you something: Your heart is black. And beautiful. Hey! (Laughter). You know I got to say that again. (Laughter). Your heart is black and beautiful. And it is in this black, beautiful earth that our God decided to plant something so powerful as God's holy Word. And in doing that, God makes us co-creators. God desires to bring something forth. Now, I am going to tip over to another gospel. In seminary, they tell you don't do that, but I am going to go over to John's gospel because in John's gospel, Jesus tells us what? Unless a seed falls to the ground and does what? -- die and dies -- it will not bring forth fruit. So now what does it mean for God's word to die inside of you? Could it mean that we must release the God that we have created? Huh? The God that we have fashioned in our own image? The God that we've manipulated and massaged so that our God just happens to hate the exact same people that we hate. (Laughter). Right? That God needs to die. The God that we've got all figured out, the God that votes like we do, the God that looks like we do, that talks like we do, that God we have all figured out that we put in a box on a shelf, that God needs to die inside of us so that we can have some fruit. Amen.

Now, sisters, I understand that for some of us this has been a very challenging week. You've heard some hard truths spoke to you. Now, I read somewhere -- I can't remember now -- but that the average person can only receive about 5% beyond what they already believe to be true. So if I give you a statistic and it sounds pretty close to what you already think, you receive that. But if I tell you something that's beyond your experience, just 10% in either direction, then you think I'm crazy. Think it's ludicrous, maybe evil, or maybe even fake news.

Oh, come on, I couldn't help it. It was right there. Come on, you know.

Oh, come on.

But see, the power of Jesus Christ and Jesus' teaching is the most impactful when it is destabilizing. When we see Jesus and we are like whoa, this is Jesus. Because when we have God all figured out, then God belongs to us and not the other way around. But when that seed dies in your heart and begins to take root, then you belong to Jesus. Isn't that what it's all about? Isn't that what it's all about?

Amen!

And if that seed does not die inside of us, it cannot bring forth fruit. And death hurts. It's the truth anyhow. Death hurts. It hurts when the Jesus that we thought was on our side has told us that now we are actually part of the problem and that we have to actually do something. News flash: Christianity is not comfortable.

No!

If you are comfortable in Jesus, you are doing it wrong. Just hey. Can we still be friends?

Jesus is not a pair of old slippers. Right? You've got them worn out and they fit the groove of your feet. Or a pair of old jeans. Jesus is not to keep you comfortable.

Let me tell you something, if Jesus had come and preached, well, this is the way we've always done it --if that Jesus had come, he would have lived to be a ripe old age, and he would have died in a nursing home facility.

But our Jesus didn't come that way. Our Jesus did not come that way. That Jesus does not exist. You will not find that God in the Bible. You will not find some God in the Bible who puts rich people above poor people. He ain't there. You keep looking, but he is not there.

Nope!

You will not find a God -- come on here -- that closes up the boundaries and leaves people out on the margins. We didn't hear all of Isaiah being read, but the beginning of that, Isaiah 55, the prophet said whoever -- whoever -- is thirsty, come on in here. Whoever is hungry, come on in here and get what you need! You don't need money, you don't need influence, you don't need to vote the right way, you don't need to do the right thing; you just need to come. God does the rest for us, in spite of us. Now, that's some good news right there. Sounds like a miracle to me; don't it?

I am going to look back at my notes. They told me not to go off script too much.

When we've got God all figured out, we are in a very dangerous place. Because our God is big. Our God is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end -- and the middle too, just in case there was any confusion. God's word teaches us that the clouds of the air are the dust of God's sandals. That's a big doggone God. That God is bigger than Westboro Baptist Church. Bless your little hearts.

Bless your little hearts. Jesus loves you too, and so do we.

Our God has been too good for us to result insult for insult. Our God has been too good for us to not be gracious with people that hate us. Come on. That's Christianity 101. The God we serve, we serve the God that lit the sun and fixed it in the sky. God reached into her pocket and flung the stars to the far-most corners of the night. This great, big God is worried about some protesters? You cannot limit this God.

And it is this God who desires to reach into our black and beautiful hearts -- (Laughter) -- and work this work of salvation so that we can be co-creators with the God of the universe. That, sisters, is a miracle.

Amen! Amen! Amen!

And that God would use the likes of us to do it. Now, you know how you are on your worst day. Hey, I'll just talk about myself. Because on my worst day, I am no good. You hear me? And once you get that revelation that you are no better than the person to your left or to your right, man, it stings a little bit, but then after that, it's liberation. Because then you know it's got to be Jesus because I know I ain't no good. This is how Paul says it. I see -- this is how Paul says it. I see some of you all looking at me. I know the Bible.

I graduated from Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Then I went to Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, so I have been Lutheranized for your protection.

This is how Paul says it. Paul says "in my flesh dwells no good thing" and when you can stand in that space, the next time we have confession, forgiveness, the next time you come to the bread and the wine, you stand in that place and feel that the God we serve does not give us what we deserve. Thank God! Thank God! God does not give us what we deserve. Instead, God gives us forgiveness. Hey. Instead, God gives us grace upon grace upon grace. And then when you stand in that place where that word that's been planted inside of you, a bird comes along and snatches it up, God is still there, extravagantly, just throwing seed like a maniac.

Call this farmer in this parable Oprah; right? You get some seeds, you get some seeds, everybody gets some seeds!

It's the extravagance of our God. That is what was so offensive. That was what was the scandal, when the original hearers heard this, they were like what? Those people over there? They get some too? Uhh.

You mean, those liberal Democrats? Those nasty women? Oh, see, I better get back on -- let me get back on.

Those people over there in the LGBTQ community? Yeah, those people too. Because otherwise, God would be the God of just us and not the God of the universe. See how that works? God cannot be God of the universe if the seed does not fall on everybody.

So yeah, you get some seeds, you get some seeds, you get some seeds, everybody gets some seeds!

And then when we do this thing together, everybody gets blessed. That's how you know God is in it. Even people at Westboro Baptist Church, I wish I could have saw a couple of them. I would have just loved on them.

I would put them in my microwave of love.

And press defrost.

You know what? Let me get back up here. Am I too close to something? Sisters, when I was getting on the plane, my husband dropped us off at the airport, and my beautiful husband said to me -- gave me a hug, he kissed me on the cheek, he said Sweetheart, behave yourself.

Now, that would be a miracle.

Let the church say. . .

Amen.

