

Ready, Set, GROW!
[Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23](#)

I remember the first time I tried to grow a vegetable garden. I am the only one in my family that likes tomatoes – that’s important to remember. I had no idea how plentiful tomato plants can be, hence I felt I needed at least 10 plants to have enough tomatoes for salad. Any gardeners here? You can see my mistake right off the bat. Needless to say, every family member, friend, neighbor, school bus driver, teacher, and distant acquaintance received tomatoes from me that year. I experienced radical growth first hand.

In the parable of the sower read from the book of Matthew, Jesus uses something very familiar to his audience. By describing a farmer sowing his field, Jesus represents a heavenly principle using earthly truths. The seeds represent the message of God’s love, and the field

represents the world or circumstances where one is when he/she receives the message.

Any of you who are farmers or gardeners can relate to the sometimes frustrating task of gaining a successful crop. With that said, how many of you would simply toss out a bunch of seeds on hard barren ground and expect a good crop? Probably none of you. Most likely you would till up the ground, add some nutrients like peat moss or fertilizer, and have water ready to add once the seeds are planted. In the parable, it appears this farmer also prepared his field, but as he is sowing his seeds, some are scattered out and away from fertile ground.

The first group of seeds falls on hard ground along a pathway. If you plant flowers or vegetables in rows it seems you end up with natural paths between the rows that can get very hard as we walk between the rows. The

ground is so hard the seeds can't even take hold so that as soon as they are thrown down they are quickly snatched away and gone forever. How can we at Mt. Tabor prepare the field so those who come seeking God can find peace and a welcome place of fellowship to better hear the message? I think this may be what is done well here. As a smaller congregation we have the unique opportunity to reach out to others and make them feel like family. We have seen people who seem to have everything by the world's standards, yet they can't seem to find inner peace without knowing God. We may have seen it with celebrities that want for nothing yet they become intent on destroying themselves. Seekers come to church looking for answers – they question whether or not what they have is all there is to life. What they are missing is a relationship with their creator who loves them more than any of us can

comprehend. We at Mt. Tabor need to make sure we have tilled and prepped the field so the message that is shared can take hold and not fall on hard, barren ground. Are people uncomfortable when they first come here or are they welcomed by everyone? When we create a safe haven for those that are seeking peace in their lives, we are helping the seeds of truth find fertile ground.

The second set of seeds finds some fertile, tilled soil but there are lots of rocks in the dirt. I am convinced that rocks multiply – it seems a constant battle to keep rocks out of garden soil. In the parable, these seeds sprout, but because there are so many rocks in the way the seeds can't take root and soon die. What are some rocks or barriers that may prevent others from taking root in the love of God? I was told on my first visit to Mt. Tabor that the door to the sanctuary is never locked – it is always open.

Perhaps this is a way to eliminate a potential rock or barrier for those seeking God. The message to the community is to come – you are always welcome here. In a subtle way we have tilled away a rock that could have served as a barrier for someone seeking comfort. I am looking forward to meeting with each of you to discuss opportunities for growth here at Mt. Tabor. How can we help those who are experiencing hard times to keep them from losing faith?

As we gather ideas, let us continue to ask God for guidance to find ways to reach our community. We may get very good at slinging rocks out of the fertile soil. I sometimes get frustrated when I think I have thoroughly tilled my garden only to have rock after rock climb to the surface.

Clearing obstacles will be a constant challenge for us as we look for ways to help our community while sharing God's

love with others. But according to Phillipians 4:13, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

The third group of seeds in the parable falls in a patch of thorns or weeds. The roots take hold in the soil but the thorns literally choke the life out of the new plants and they soon die. How can we at Mt. Tabor prevent becoming like the thorns? The church in general has been criticized for appearing no different than the world in terms of gossip, aloofness, and lack of inclusiveness. Can we make sure newcomers are included in our family so that when the worries of life do distract them, they have a place of rest here? Can we accept others in the spirit of Christian love and kindness? Again, I believe this is an area where we at Mt. Tabor can thrive. Keeping thorns at bay, like slinging rocks out of fertile soil, can also be a constant battle.

Genuine hospitality is a true gift from God, and once again, this is an area that a smaller congregation can do very well.

Our society seems to be promoting independence more and more through the internet, video games, virtual reality, telecommuting, and rewards for individuals instead of groups. Yet community is so important and often what seekers are looking for. We saw this in Acts Chapter 2 which depicts what is seen as the birth of the Christian church. 120 people were gathered together when the Holy Spirit descended. The importance of community was reinforced when from that day on the expanded group of over 3,000 began worshipping in each others homes, breaking bread together and studying the scriptures. Community-family-a sense of belonging. These are things sought after by many souls today in spite of the value placed on looking out for self and the so-called value of

isolation/independence. Can we at Mt. Tabor provide a weed-free zone? Can we make sure that everyone who comes here can find a clear path to God's love?

Our bishop calls this principle 'Radical Hospitality'.

At this year's annual conference we celebrated milestones with our Methodist faith. Rev. DaeHwa Park noted that the first Korean diplomatic mission came to the United States in June 1883. While traveling from San Francisco to Washington DC, the group was approached by Rev. John F. Goucher, a Methodist pastor. This pastor invited the group to dinner and had an opportunity to hear the situation of Korea of the late 19th century. Rev. Goucher launched a fundraising campaign for the Korean mission. IN 1885, he was able to sponsor Rev. H.G. Appenzeller, the first Methodist missionary to Korea. Rev. Appenzeller and his wife arrived in Korea on Easter Sunday April 5, 1885.

Today the Korean Methodist Church celebrates its 128th anniversary, with 5,619 churches and over 1 million members.

How can we at Mt. Tabor demonstrate radical hospitality? Could we handle the possible results of that hospitality? I had 10 tomato plants that produced an exponential number of tomatoes. The Acts 2 church saw an increase in membership from 120 to 3,000 in 1 day. The Korean missionary trip initiated a movement to gain over 1 million believers – roughly 10,000 new believers every year. Where would we put everyone? What a wonderful problem to have!

Our goal is to create fertile soil so the seeds that are planted for new believers have a chance to take hold, sprout, develop roots, grow and thrive. So what is needed? What are the nutrients that we need to put in our soil?

What's our Miracle Grow? I've heard it say that all it takes is 1 part water, 2 parts sun and 3 parts prayer.

- 1 part water = Knowledge – we need to ground ourselves in the word of God. What is our story? We were sinners, Christ died for our sin, he rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, we have the promise of eternal life through Christ.
- 2 parts sunshine = Nurturing/Caring – Providing for the needs of the community not just our church family. This includes evangelism where we share the gift of God's love with others. Unlike other gifts that are gone as soon as you give it away, the gift of God's love only grows the more we share it. The gift of God's love is like no other in that it only gets better, stronger and sweeter the more you give it away.
- 3 parts Prayer – it seems so simple yet prayer can be a powerful tool. A missionary visited his home church in Michigan and shared this story:

“While serving at a small field hospital in Africa, every two weeks I traveled by bicycle through the jungle to a nearby city for supplies. This was a journey of two days and required camping overnight at the halfway point. On one of these journeys, I arrived in the city where I planned to collect money from the

bank, purchase medicine and supplies, and then begin my two-day journey back to the field hospital.

Upon arrival in the city, I observed two men fighting, one of whom had been seriously injured. I treated him for his injuries and at the same time talked to him about the Lord. I then traveled two days, camping overnight, and arrived home without incident.

Two weeks later I repeated my journey. Upon arriving in the city, I was approached by the young man I had treated. He told me that he had known I carried money and medicines. He said, ‘Some friends and I followed you into the jungle, knowing you would camp overnight. We planned to kill you and take your money and drugs. But just as we were about to move into your camp, we saw that you were surrounded by 26 armed guards.’ At this I laughed and said that I was certainly all alone in that jungle campsite. The young man pressed the point, however, and said, ‘No sir, I was not the only person to see the guards. My friends also saw them, and we all counted them. It was because of those guards that we were afraid and left you alone.’”

At this point in the sermon on of the men in the congregation jumped to his feet and interrupted the missionary and asked if he could tell him the exact day this happened. The missionary told the congregation the date, and the man who interrupted told him this story:

“On the night of your incident in Africa, it was morning here and I was preparing to go play golf. I

was about to putt when I felt the urge to pray for you. In fact, the urging of the Lord was so strong, I called men in this church to meet with me here in the sanctuary to pray for you. Would all of those men who met with me on that day stand up?"

The men who had met together to pray that day stood up. The missionary wasn't concerned with who they were, he was too busy counting how many men he saw. THERE WERE 26.

Prayer is indeed a most powerful tool.

So Mt. Tabor, I believe we are ready. I believe we are set.

Let's grow. Amen.