

A High Impact Life: Let 'er Rip

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Luke 8:4-15

We're finishing our sermon series on a High Impact Life and after our anthem today you're going to hear a Scripture that you may be very familiar with. It's the parable of the soils and what I'd like to ask you to do is as you hear it read you can follow along if you'd like. Or you can close your eyes. But I want you to try and figure out who you are in the parable. Where do I fit in this parable? How does this apply to me as you hear the scripture read?

When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold. As he said this, he called out, Let anyone with ears to hear listen!

Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that in looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand.

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance. Luke 8:4-15 (NRSV)

Prayer by Rev. Michelle Manuel - Gracious God we are thankful to be here. This morning we once more orient ourselves toward you. We came in here with stuff. Stuff on our shoulders, stuff that's weighing us down, stuff that may not be ours to carry. And very innocently we hold on to those things. Things that aren't really for us to fix or manage or control. God would you hold us now in this moment and help us to exhale all the stuff. Help us to let go for a little while and rest in your presence here and now amongst our church family. There are so many that are in need of your grace and love this morning, those who are in Dallas recovering from the recent tornado, those who are caught in war and violence in Syria, those who await asylum, and those who are working at the Texas and Mexico border. Some of us stand in need of healing this morning. Some of our bodies are weak and weary from treatments of various types. Some are struggling with their mental health and those of us who are broken and who are struggling with broken relationships. Lord hold us, love us right where we are. Bring healing and love for us who need it. Bring healing to our land, bodies, and to our lives. And Lord give us ears to hear and eyes to see the Kingdom, the Kingdom of God coming here. We pray all these things just as you taught us.

Before I preach, I meant to tell you that during the announcements that we are in the middle of our Giving with Gratitude campaign and if you have not had the chance to make a commitment to our 2020 work, we'd love for you to do that. There are pledge cards there in your pew or you can go online to do that. This is really about us making a commitment - not just with dollars but with our whole selves to the work of the church next year. Just hope you'll be intentional and pray about that.

Let's join together in prayer. *O God open us up today. Open our eyes that we might see you all around us in this service today and as our day goes on. Open our ears that we might hear your word in the midst of these words. And open our hearts that those words might fall in and change us from the inside out. And then, O Lord, as we're changed may we open our hands to serve. Amen.*

So let me very briefly review what this "High Impact Life" has been about. We said first and foremost that the basic premise in Philippians 2 - it says, "So work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in you to will and act according to his good pleasure."

The principle is God works in our lives, we work out. We work out our salvation - we don't earn it - but we do something with it. You've been given this salvation - God working in your life so what will you do with it. That's the basic premise of what we're talking about today in the "High Impact Life."

Then the next week Katie Montgomery Mears shared with us that we're to start small. That we don't have to end world hunger but maybe if we just focused on doing acts of goodness and kindness. Sharing the Gospel, making an impact on one person, the person right next to us. That we're to do small things with great love.

Then the next week we looked at the notion that Jesus said to us, "Greater works than these will you do." Greater works than Jesus we'll do? How does that happen? Well, it happens when we come together collectively to be the Body of Christ. And when there's a movement of God. Jesus never went more than 100 miles from his home. Maybe healed a thousand people, I don't know. But what has the church done when we come together? The impact is huge.

Then last week we talked about marshalling our resources that in fact God has given us everything we need to accomplish, everything to which God has called us. God has given us everything we need to accomplish that to which God has called us. But we have to manage it. We have to take what God's given us. Our time, our energy, our talents, our money, our relationships all of those things and deploy them into the calling that we've been given.

So today I sort of want us to conclude with this notion that we need to "Let 'er Rip!"

I want you to think back to who you were in that parable as it was read. So maybe some of you were the hard pathway soil. The Word of God fell upon you and before you could really appropriate it it was snatched away. And you just don't really believe. I don't think many would be here but there may be some.

Maybe some of you were the rocky soil. When the Gospel fell in your heart you believed with all your heart and you were so on fire. It grew so fast, but it never really took root and it became just a passing fad for you. And so now you're here just going through the motions. That might be some of you.

It might be that some of you find yourselves as the thorny soil, the thorny area in which the Word of God fell. You found yourself excited and working for Christ. But as time went on the cares of life just getting through the day, paying the bills, and dealing with the kids, just all the challenges of life began to choke it out. And it doesn't seem so real anymore.

Or maybe some of you are the good soil. And it just landed, and you produce a hundred-fold, a thousand-fold. Your life is fruitful.

I want to challenge you today to maybe think about it differently. To think that in addition to being one of those kinds of soil, I propose to you that the purpose of this parable is to tell us that we are to be the sowers. Yes, certainly it's about us being the soil, but Jesus' intent is to remind us that we are not just the soil, but we are the sower. That we are to claim our identities in Christ as those whose job it is to sow the seed of the Gospel.

I love the line at the beginning. It just says, "A sower went out to sow seeds." I don't know why I find that so interesting. Of course a sower went out to sow seeds. What else would a sower do? But if you think about what he's saying, that's who you are. You are a sower. Now go sow some seeds! That's who your identity in Christ is as a sower.

I can demonstrate this to you by looking at the verse that follows it immediately. He's staying on the same theme as he's teaching. He says, "No one after lighting a lamp hides it under a jar or puts it under a bed but puts it on a lampstand so that those who enter may see the light." Let your light shine, sow your seeds.

At various times in my life I've experimented with different types of devotionals in the morning to keep me focused on what's right. I have a fairly short attention span and get bored easily, so I try different things. And one over the years that has been so significant to me is pretty simple. That is that I light a candle and I look at the candle and I remind myself that that candle does what it does, accomplishes what it accomplishes, very simply by being what it is. It doesn't set out to move into the next room and light up that room, too. It doesn't make a task list of all the places it needs to light up. It just wherever it goes, wherever it's been taken, it lights. It does what it does by being who it is.

I think that's what God tells us to do. You're a sower. I've worked in your life. I've formed you and created you to be a special person, a unique person. I've given you spiritual gifts, I've given you resources, and I've given you relationships. I've given you time. I've given you all those things and I've created you not like anyone else. You have an identity in Christ as a sower of seeds. So go live that out!

There's a famous little parable by a man named Martin Buber who was a Jewish philosopher. He gathered a bunch of little parables by rabbis called "Tales of the Hasidim." One of them is probably the most famous.

He says that there was an ancient rabbi named Zusya. And as Zusya neared the end of his life he said, "In the world to come the Lord will not ask me, 'Zusya, why were you not Moses?' The Lord will ask me, 'Zusya, why were you not Zusya?'"

The Lord will not ask me, "Why were you not Billy Graham?" "Why were you not Mother Teresa?" But the Lord may ask me, "Why were you not Tom? I made you this way. This is how I formed you, and shaped and created you. And this is how I worked in your life. Why did you spend all your time twisting to become someone that you admire over here? Or kind of bending yourself to keep these people over here happy? Or maybe they'll like you better? No, I gave you, I made you to be a sower of seeds as only you can sow. So you claim that identity. You live that identity fully."

We've got to claim our identities as sowers of God's word. Sowers of the seed in a way that only we can do.

The next thing I think this teaches us is that the sower sows indiscriminately. So if you ever go to Israel, though now, they do it differently, in the ancient days they would not change the soil. They wouldn't have these furrows that were done with a plow. Instead, they would just throw the seed. Some of it would land in good places; some of it would land in not so good places. But it was indiscriminate. They just went out there and sowed the seed.

How many of you have heard the name John Chapman and his story? Raise your hand if you do - I'm not going to make you speak. Actually, you do know the story of John Chapman because it's the story of Johnny Appleseed. You just didn't know who he was. Some of you thought that you might know but you were afraid to raise your hand.

So Johnny Appleseed traveled throughout the Midwest and he was known for planting apple trees wherever he went. We've got a picture of him just throwing apples around. He was a little more intentional than that I must say. But what I didn't know until I read about it was that he was also an evangelist. He was a part of a church called the New Church Movement which came out of Sweden. It was a reform theological tradition and everywhere he went as he planted apple trees, he also shared the Gospel. Indiscriminately, with whoever he met.

When I learned to preach, the professor that made the greatest impact on me was the advanced preaching professor. His name was Zan Holmes and some of you have seen him in the Disciple series. I worked really hard at learning to preach. And when I started, I was a manuscript preacher. It was manuscripted and I stood in the pulpit and I was an incredible artist.

I mean those words were crafted beautifully. And I wasn't going to change. I was just going to read that, after all I'd worked hard at it.

So ultimately Zan came to preach a revival for me and challenged me in another way. He said, "I need you to put your notes aside and just preach. You are not leaving any reason for the Holy Spirit to work. You are trying to control everything. What I want you to do is to work hard before you get there. Study the stuff, learn your sermon, plan your outline. Get it all ready, then get up and let 'er rip! Just let 'er rip and see what the Holy Spirit will do. It's a lot more fun."

So every once in a while, I let 'er rip" and then think that that part wasn't the Holy Spirit. That was probably something else leading me astray. But the truth is that there is such an amazing freedom in that. And in deciding that I don't have to control it all. What I need to do is to live out who I am and what I believe and what God has working in my life to express. I think that's true of all of us. It's not just about preaching, it's about how we live. That we try and control everything and make sure that we dot our i's and cross our t's and that we never venture out and do anything.

I have a friend who has on his mirror, "Don't do anything stupid today." I think to myself that that's not a bad thing to say, but sometimes we just find ourselves so controlled. We lose all boldness and we don't really leave any room for the Holy Spirit.

My evangelism professor once said, "You defend Jesus like you defend a lion. You open the cage door and get out of the way." I think that's true. We don't have to sell Jesus to anyone; we are journalists, not salespeople. And we just tell the story of what God is doing and we demonstrate it, and we live it, and we let God worry about the rest of it.

So that leads me to the third component and that's that when we choose to live that way, to live indiscriminately and "let 'er rip" what we do is realize that we are not responsible for success or failure. We are only responsible for faithfulness.

In other words we are called to be faithful to the Gospel, to who God made us to be, to our identity in Christ. And let God worry about the success. Sometimes we're going to fail.

One of the most painful things that I do as a pastor is visit with families who have children who have made bad decisions. They're now grown, and they've made bad decisions or maybe they've turned away from the faith altogether.

And the parents sit in my office and say, "What did I do wrong? We witnessed to them and showed them God's love in every way. We weren't harsh. We did everything we could think of that was right. We brought them to church. Yet they're not what we wanted them to be."

It's not up to us to control whatever everyone becomes. All we can do is witness.

My daughter works in a program that works with foster care children who are nearing moving out of the system - aging out of the system. She works with them to get mentors into their lives. Sometimes she tries to get them adopted. But she always tries to get mentors into their lives to encourage them and help them find their way.

So she and her husband decided to mentor this young man as he was graduating from high school. They helped him get through the application process for college. They helped him get scholarships so he could go to the University of Houston. They went to his dorm room like parents would do and got it all fixed up. He was saying, "Get out, guys, I can do this." They went to the parent orientation. They worked so hard mentoring him, having a birthday party for him, all sorts of things. After a while he just dropped out of school.

It's so hard. You think, "What's the point?" Well, the point is that we're being faithful - that's the point. You do the best you can. You "let 'er rip"- you're faithful. Then let God worry about the results, the success, because we can't control everything.

Sometimes we're faithful and then something happens that we hadn't intended to happen but is different. Like, I have a friend who's a pastor who grew up in the city. His first appointment was to a little dinky church out in the country. He said that he wanted to connect with his congregation, so he was going to take up gardening in his yard. So he plants a little furrow, gets a handful of seeds and carries them out and sprinkles them in the furrow. He closes it up, and waters it and nothing grows.

But, he said, remarkably on the path where he carried the seeds out a squash popped up. He talked to his congregation about it and they said, there's a word for that. They called it "a volunteer." I had not heard that before. A volunteer plant. Had you heard that? So, you didn't make it happen, it just showed up by itself and volunteered itself to be a plant. It's called a volunteer plant.

And I think that happens a lot of times. We're so diligent trying to make something happen and God does something else over here in the midst of it.

John Wesley came to Georgia on a mission that was a dismal failure by any measure. In fact he left town on a ship just ahead of the law that were trying to pick him up. He's our mentor in Christ - isn't that great! But he did two things. He left a hymn book which became the hymnbook for the Anglican church in America even. And he started Sunday school. His mother had had Sunday School in England, and he said let's start Sunday School here in Georgia. And Sunday School took off. The Methodist movement did not accelerate across the United States until Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke came to the U.S. That's where the United States became evangelized, not so much from Wesley.

But on Wesley's journey here he intended to be one thing, but it became something all together different.

You don't really know what might happen. And sometimes that's what happens. We do something and we never get to really see the impact of it but there is an impact. If you remember a few weeks ago Katie Montgomery Mears talked about how if everyone in this room were to do something to make an impact on the life of 10 people, and those people made an impact on 10 people, and those people made an impact on 10 people, the impact would be huge. We might not be able to see it, but it would be there.

There was a scientist who in 1971 realized that if you make a very small variation in one of the variables that there was a huge variation in the outcome data. He wrote a paper in 1972 that was published. The man's name is Edward Lorenz, and he was a meteorologist. The paper was titled "Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly's Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas?"

This became famously known as the "butterfly effect." You have probably heard about it. The Butterfly Effect is that if any one little thing happens with a butterfly then down the road decades, even centuries later, the impact may be beyond ...Science fiction writers have written about it, it may be this huge impact.

We don't really know.

Bill Denham gave me this to read and we've been talking about it. It's a succession of ordination. Here's what it says, "John Wesley was consecrated on September 21, 1784, Thomas Coke." Then "Thomas Coke ordained on Dec. 26, 1784 Francis Asbury." "Francis Asbury ordained on December 25, 1791, William McKendree." "William McKendree ordained in 1810 John Early." John Early ordained in 1875 Robert Kennon Hargrove." "Robert Kennon Hargrove ordained in 1893 Hiram Abiff..." What a poor guy's name! "Hiram Abiff Boaz ordained in

October 1936 O. Eugene Slater.” “O. Eugene Slater ordained in June 1974, Janice Riggle Huie. Janice Riggle Huie ordained on May 30, 2007 William Ernest Denham III.”

Isn't that cool? Do you think that John Wesley when he ordained Thomas Coke had Bill Denham in mind?

You don't really know what the impact of one small thing would be. So what might be some of the seeds you plant? The Scripture tells us that the seed is the Word of God. Well, let me just say that when we say the Word of God it means the Bible, but it's really the Gospel itself. The Word of God, the *logos* of God is the Gospel. It is the message of God to us that in Jesus Christ God's love for us is made evident in his death on a cross. And we are saved through that event.

And how do we communicate that love, that Gospel to everyone? What kinds of seeds do we plant? Deeds of kindness. Work for justice. A listening ear. Old fashioned church work - teaching a Sunday School class or working with youth. Be on the hospitality team or join a committee at the church. Go to the hospitals. Generous gifts to the church and to other places. Words of affirmation. Encouraging people. Prayers for people. God uses our prayers in ways we don't even completely understand. But especially being willing to talk to someone about how God's been at work in your life. To be able to just share what God has done. Authentically, about who *you* are. Not some formula that you got from a booklet but what you've experienced God doing in your life. Because God made you a sower of seeds. You're Johnny Appleseed. So let's go sow seeds.

Gracious and loving God, we know that you have made us. You have created us; you have filled us with spiritual gifts. You have shaped us in the image of your Son Jesus. You have given us this new identity in Christ. And we pray that out of that we might authentically plant seeds of the Gospel, seeds of love, every place we go. Everything we do would brighten up the very room we walk into, would bring your light into that place. God, we admit that we want to see the results, but remind us that those results are up to you. That we are the sowers, but you are the one who reaps the harvest. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.