

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts meet with your gracious approval O Lord, My strength, my rock, and our extravagant word of truth, grace, and love. Amen.

I must confess my favorite line in this passage is the first one. Matthew says, "That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Jesus is sitting on the beach at the Sea of Galilee. Sitting in front of a body of water and just staring off into the distance. Jesus seems to be found many times hanging around fishing communities, around bodies of water. When I worked at the desk at the Winfield Inn I'd often get asked the question by tourists. "What is the one thing that we should do, or see before we leave?" My answer was always the same, "Experience Lake Superior in anyway you can. Whether it's an excursion around the Islands, fishing, a ferry ride, rock hunting, or just sitting on the beach. Experience the Big Lake."

In 2017 Christina Heiser wrote an article titled, "What the Beach Does To Your Brain." Here is what science says about this miraculous vitamin SEA. Those who live by a large body of water report better physical and mental health than those who don't. And if you are fortunate enough to have a view you are calmer than those who don't. Staring into or out over this body of water actually changes your brain waves frequency and puts you in a mild meditative state. The blue of the water is associated with boosts of creativity. Plus, that consistent ebbing and flowing you hear from the water kind of de-stimulates our brains. Even the physical sensation of putting our feet in warm sand causes us to relax.

In several studies this kind of beach mindfulness when experienced regularly found that the area of the brain responsible for stress actually shrunk in size. And on the flip side, the parts of the brain responsible for memory, reasoning, and empathy grew. I remember from my psychology class in college that we all have stress, we all do, but it's how one handles it that makes the difference.

Jesus takes full advantage of the beach, centering himself in the presence of His Father after a long week. A week of teaching, healing, and confrontation. Jesus, like us needs a day at the beach! But Jesus doesn't get a day or even an afternoon before a crowd shows up. And such a large crowd that he gets into a boat before he begins again to teach the people with a parable.

Father Robert Capon says that the “parable of the sower” is the touchstone of all the parables. He notes its primacy of place in all three synoptics. Even the gnostic Gospel of Thomas includes the parable of the sower. In Matthew, the parable of the sower is the first of a string of parables that follow one after another and sets the stage for the parables that follow.

So today’s story is about a sower who goes out to sow. And the twist is this sower appears to be extremely careless, throwing valuable seed in places where it can do no good. I mean he’s throwing seed on the footpath, among the rocks, and into the thorn bushes.

Barbara Brown Taylor, says about the parable of the sower. . . We hear the story and think it is a story about us, but what if we are wrong? What if it is not about us at all but about the sower? What if it is not about our own successes and failures and birds and rocks and thorns but about the extravagance of a sower who does not seem to be fazed by such concerns, who flings seed everywhere, wastes it with holy abandon, who feeds the birds, whistles at the rocks, picks his way through the thorns, shouts hallelujah at the good soil and just keeps on sowing, confident that there is enough seed to go around, that there is plenty, and that when the harvest comes at last it will fill every barn in the neighborhood to the rafters.

Jesus says, “Let anyone with ears listen!”

In the missing verses, Jesus tells the disciples that they get to hear “the secrets of the kingdom of heaven,” but others do not. Remember Jesus often encouraged people to listen, with ears to hear. People were having a hard time comprehending what he was saying. His message was counter-intuitive. Jesus is not talking about business as usual with a triumphal power display. He begins, “a sower went out to sow.”

Father Robert Capon says in his book *Parables of the Kingdom*:

“Once again, this is not our idea of how a respectable divine operation ought to be run...Given our druthers, our pet illustration of the kingdom would probably be a giant nail--driven into the world, appropriately enough, and a giant hammer in the hand of a giant God. Something noisy and noticeable. But a seed? Oh come now.”

In verse 18, Jesus calls the story "the parable of the sower." It means that this is a parable about God, and not about us. For once you're not getting a sermon about our feeble efforts to put God's word into action. It's about what God does. It's about what God does.

God is the sower, and God sows the Word—*logo* everywhere. The word some scholars say is "the word", "meaning "Jesus" from John's gospel, "the word made flesh." Others say here that "*logos*" is strictly God's word, God's word of love, and truth, and grace, and life. This word is more than letters on a page, it's word filled with power. This word, this seed is sown extravagantly, lavishly into the entire world without any participation on our part what so ever.

This word, this seed that is sown so extravagantly, grows in the most unlikely of places. Among rocks, and thorns and even the birds come and snatch it and carry it away. It's already there and doing it's growing, and it's not waiting for us. And what about those birds that carry the seed away. The Greek word for bird here is actually not the devil or even evil but this seed, God's word, just ends up someplace else. Did you ever have a plant or tree come up in your garden or yard and wonder where it came from.

If this is really the parable of the Sower and not the parable of the different kinds of ground, then it begins to sound quite new. The focus is not on us and our shortfalls but on the generosity of our maker, the prolific sower who does not obsess about the condition of the fields, who is not stingy with the seed but who casts it everywhere, on good soil and bad, who is not cautious or judgmental or even very practical, but who seems willing to keep reaching into his seed bag for all eternity, covering the whole creation with the fertile seed of his truth, his love, her grace, and life.

Jesus really has only one message, Go to the beach, go to the Big Lake and contemplate the God, whom he calls *Abba*, is with you and me. The Kingdom of heaven is near and this is very good news for all people. All of us, the immigrant, the transgender person, the prisoner, the disabled, the addicted, the dying, all of us receive this good news. All God's hopes and dreams, love and grace are continually breaking into this world, in quite tangible and visible ways. Breaking into our world with abundance and extravagance. Let anyone with ears, listen! Amen.