In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My sermon text for this morning is the introduction to our Lord’s parable of the Sower. It is a simple sentence. The verse goes this way:

Listen! A sower went forth to sow. (Matthew 13:3, NRSV)

God bless that sower. He went forth to sow.

Last Sunday we heard the beautiful invitation of our Lord Jesus that a weary and heavy-laden humanity should come onto him. That was in Matthew 11. Now I would like us to try to reckon with the simple idea that if anyone comes to Jesus, it is likely that beforehand there was a sower of God’s Word in that person’s life. There was someone who planted a seed in that person’s life. And the sowing of that seed was one of the great events on earth. It led to the salvation of a soul. It lead to something about which the angels in heaven rejoiced.

I am especially interested in the Sower at this time of year because it will not be long before our Vacation Bible School begins. That is in August – August 21 to 25. And then, soon after that, our Sunday School will begin again here at Immanuel. We are talking about great things when we talk about Vacation Bible School and Sunday School. Holy things have happened in these children’s ministries over the years! Little ones have been introduced to Jesus! Many good seeds of God’s word have been sown by the teachers of Vacation Bible School and Sunday School over the generations!

I can testify that in my own life it has been simple, plain Christians who sowed the good seed and introduced me to Jesus. Over the course of my life I have been privileged to be taught by some of the great theologians and great minds of America. But the ones who brought me to Christ were first of all my dear parents, Rachel and Paul, and my Sunday school teachers – plain Christians like Sister Nelly Scott and Sister Mabel Dukes. They might not have had theological degrees but they had the love of Jesus in their hearts and they were willing to sow the good seed concerning Jesus. This is what I want for us here at Immanuel! I am yearning that we should touch more children with the good news of Jesus. I want our congregation to be renowned for trying to make possible what Jesus said: Let the little ones come unto me. It’s a tough world out there. I want people to have Jesus in their hearts as they face the slings and arrows, the joys and disappointments, the opportunities and temptations of life. I invite everyone who hears me, anyone who hears me and
who loves the Lord, to become a Sunday School teacher or a Vacation Bible school teacher or assistant, or do something to sow the word either in the life of children or in the life of teenagers or grown-ups, because there are many, many people in our world whose lives would be better and happier if they would come to Jesus. We need sowers. We need it to be the case that it can be said about Immanuel Lutheran Church that behold, A sower went forth to sow. When people think of our church I want them to exclaim to themselves, What a group of sowers they have at that church! What a generation of sowers! They have organized themselves and they have offered themselves to Jesus as sowers of his word in the lives of a weary and heavy-laden humanity.

Some of the sowing will bare rich harvest – even 100 fold. Some will be more modest – 60 fold or 30. But if even one seed takes strong root in the life of someone else, that is a great thing on earth. That is the kind of thing over which heaven will rejoice.

So my topic this morning is The Sower. I have two themes to make about the sower of God’s Word. First, if you should be a sower of God’s Word, you shall be part of a noble company of sowers. And second, joining that noble company is the right thing for you.

First, then: the college of sowers is a very noble college. You do not need to be eloquent, you do not need to be learned. If you love Jesus and have tried to learn of him in the Bible, from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation, then you are qualified to be better than a knight of the Round Table. Why, you are qualified to join the Holy Society of Sowers.

The head and champion of the Society of Sowers is our Lord Jesus Christ. In our First Lesson we read of the sure victory of God’s word. In Isaiah 55, we have the great testimony that the word of the Lord shall not return to him empty but shall prosper in the thing for which the Lord sent it sent him. Well, the word that shall not fail is chief of all our Lord Jesus Christ. He is both the Word of God and the Sower of God’s Word. In his own earthly ministry he preached and proclaimed the kingdom of God, and in his resurrected life, he is the great subject of our preaching and he is the great friend of all preachers. Jesus is the Sower above all sowers, and he lives to be on the side of any sowing of his word that we may do. If you and I should try to speak of Jesus, we shall be speaking of the ultimate subject, the victorious one, the one who in the end will be manifest to all of us. If we should try to sow the seed of Jesus in the lives of our Sunday school children, or our family, or our neighbors, then we shall not be speaking in vain. We shall not be speaking idly. We shall be speaking of the most important and encouraging Subject on earth.

In the great company of sowers of God’s word, we join the apostles under the leadership of Jesus. There is a wonderful story in Acts Chapter 5 about the apostles and their early witness to Jesus in Jerusalem. They are arrested for this witness, this sowing of the word, and they are a sent to prison. But no
matter. In the nighttime the angel of the Lord simply opens the prison doors and the apostles went out and began preaching again, began sowing the word of God again. So they were arrested again. The ones who arrested them were tempted to treat them very severely, but their lives were saved by a wise member of the council named Gamaliel. So the council simply beat the apostles and set them free with strict instructions that they were not to preach about Jesus again, they were not to sow the seed anymore. But how could the apostles be silent? And so the story ends in this defiant way:

...and when [the council] had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. (Acts 5:40-42, KJV)

They ceased not to be sowers of God’s word. When we ourselves try to pass on Jesus to others we join good and noble folk like the apostles. And it is not just the apostles. If you and I have found Christ, it is probably because some good person showed the seed of Christ in our hearts. Now it is our turn to join them.

I end this sermon with my second theme: If we belong to Christ, it is appropriate for us to somehow be sowers of God’s Word. It is fitting that we not keep Jesus to ourselves, but try our hand at sharing him with a weary and heavy-laden world. We were committed to this when we were baptized. Recall the words of welcome at the end of the baptism liturgy. Some of us have heard them many times over the years:

WELCOME

Through Baptism God has made [N] a member of the priesthood we all share in Christ Jesus, that we may proclaim the praise of God and bear his creative and redeeming Word to all the world.

Notice the agricultural sound of these words:

...and bear his creative and redeeming Word to all the world.

And behold, a sower went forth to sow.
Our God could create faith on earth without human sowers. Of course he could! But he chooses not to. He chooses to risk faith on earth to human testimony. He chooses to entrust a weary and heavy-laden humanity to us, in hope that we will speak up and try to help others along by speaking of Jesus. God bless the Sunday School teachers on earth. God bless the Vacation Bible School workers on earth. God bless the parents and grandparents who try to pass on the faith of the church to their children in an increasingly secular, even scoffing world. God bless the city preachers. God bless the country preachers. God bless anyone who loves Jesus and tries to bring others to him, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen

\(^1\)One of many good points made by Spurgeon in his sermon “The Sower.”