

# "The Careless Extravagant Grace of God"

Genesis 25:19-34; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 25-30

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Genesis 25:19-34

These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, {20} and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. {21} Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. {22} The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. {23} And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger." {24} When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. {25} The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. {26} Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. {27} When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. {28} Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob. {29} Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. {30} Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.) {31} Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." {32} Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" {33} Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. {34} Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

## **Galatians 3:23-29**

<sup>23</sup>Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. <sup>24</sup>Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup>But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, <sup>26</sup>for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. <sup>27</sup>As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup>And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

## Matthew 13:1-9

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

"Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

“Jenkins Feed and Seed” was one of those old fashioned farm stores that was just off the square in the small town in the eastern half of N.C., or S.C. or Virginia, or in any rural location almost anywhere in the U.S. Most of the time there was a bay door that opened into a warehouse that stored feed and seed and farm equipment and an array of other necessary items. In the seed and feed store of his childhood, the aforementioned “Jenkins,” which was actually in the small town in which his grandparents lived, the proprietor, yes, Mr. Jenkins, was a jovial rather whimsical kind of man that made an impression on young children.

In the store, up near the cash register, which in those days was for cash, there was a barrel and on the barrel was a sign that said, “Sow some magic seeds – 2 cents a bag.” Too shy to actually ask Mr. Jenkins the boy asked his grandfather as they were loading the truck about magic seeds. His grandfather laughed and told him that it was just some fun for Mr. Jenkins. That the truth was it was most likely the seeds that spilled to the warehouse floor and were dumped in the barrel. “But,” he said, “If you want some” reaching into his pocket, “here’s two cents. You go ahead and get a bag.” The boy ran back into the store and looked in the barrel. There were all sorts of seeds of all colors and sizes. Mr. Jenkins noticed him, came over and said, “Well young man, are you in the market for some magic seeds?” The boy, too shy to speak, simply nodded and held out the 2 cents. Mr. Jenkins said, “For first time seed buyers there’s a special. You get

your bag of seeds and,” reaching into the penny candy jar, “2 cents worth of jaw breakers.” With that he took out the candy and handed it to the boy. Then, to the boys delight and surprise, Mr. Jenkins took a paper grocery sack and a large scoop and plunging into the barrel he filled the bags with an amazing amount of all sorts of seeds.

Handing the seeds to the boy, Mr. Jenkins also placed a half sheet of paper in the top of the bag. Mr. Jenkins said, “you can read, can’t you young man?” Nod of head in the affirmative. “Good, because these are the instruction for the seeds.”

Riding back to the farm, the boy was reading the instructions much to the delight of his grandfather who knew that their first task when they arrived would be to do exactly what the instructions said. Across the top of the piece of paper in block letters were the words. “These Seeds, Like All of God’s Seeds, Are Magic.” On the piece of paper, in Mr. Jenkins very neat hand printed letters were these instructions. 1. Find a patch of ground or a seed bed. 2. Prepare the soil. 3. Sow the seeds extravagantly and don’t worry if some stray of blow in the wind. That is God’s way. (See Matthew 13.) 4. Make sure that there is some water. God will do the rest. 5. See what grows and enjoy the magic of the seeds. Which, after unloading, is exactly what they did.

There was a flower patch that his grandmother had cleared earlier in the week and she was asked if it was o.k. to use it for the seeds. She gladly agreed.

They raked through the soil in the patch which, as fate would have it, ran along the edge of the hard dirt path drive to the barn. On number 3 the boy said, “what does Matthew 13 say Pops?” His grandfather said, ‘let’s grab some lunch and read it and find out. At the lunch table his grandmother opened the family bible and read the parable of the sower to them. Which of course made perfect sense to the boy. Antsy to get on with the process he said he had one more question. “What does extravagantly mean?” His grandparents looked at each other and wondered themselves. His grandmother said, ‘wait a minute, and fetched the large dictionary from the shelf. She said to the boy, “can you find it?” He beamed because looking up words was one of his favorite things to do. She cleared his plate and put the large volume in front of him. He carefully traced his finger along the tabs and opened to the “E’s” Flipping pages he found ec, ef, er, ew, and then ex. “Here it is,” he said, holding his finger in place. It says, **a** : exceeding the limits of reason or necessity **b** : lacking in moderation, balance, and restraint *extravagant* **c** : extremely or excessively elaborate. Looking at this grandmother he said, ‘but what does that mean, you know, about seeds.’

She thought deeply about it and said, ‘you know in the Bible story the sower who spreads the seeds?’ He nodded. ‘Well in a few minutes that will be you.’ ‘Me?’ he said. “Yes, you will take the seeds and spread them on the ground.” Nod. “But you will do it extravagantly, just throwing

them, lot's of them, all around, not minding at all where and how they fall, like the instructions say, don't worry if some stray of blow in the wind. That is God's way." His grandfather said, 'in the story the man sowing the seeds, the farmer, didn't seem to care where the seeds went. He must have had a lot of seeds. I'm a bit more careful. But he just threw them and you remember where they went?"

The boy said, " on the path, and in the thorns, and where birds could eat them.' "Right," his grandfather said, "God's way is to sow seeds" and pulling on his chin he completed the thought, "anywhere and everywhere. I guess that's extravagant. Exceeding the limits. Lacking in moderation. Going for it!"

The boy said, "let's go for it! C'mon grandma, you come too!" And they did. They watched as the boy sowed that bag of seeds -- extravagantly. Some fell right where they should. And some went on the path. And some blew in the air and ended up in the weeds. And pretty quickly the bag was empty and the boy said, "was that extravagant?" And his grandparents smiled and laughed.

Believe it or not this parable of the sower was the scripture for one of the very first sermons I ever preached. Way back in the summer of 1977 as I preached at a small church in the town I attended college. Since then I have no idea how many sermons and how many ways the story has been told. Most of the time the approach is more about the soil than the sower. You know, we're

supposed to be the kinds of soil. Good, bad or indifferent. But the other day I was online researching the parable once again and up pops this little cartoon we have on the front of the bulletin. From a cartoon source called Agnus Day, the view point shifts and the focus of the story moves from the soil to the sower, to the careless extravagance of seeds flung everywhere as a sign of God's grace.

Isn't that how it's supposed to be? Isn't the nature of God that Jesus is trying to expose to us, an absolutely extravagant God with such a deep bag of seeds to sow, such an abundant amount grace to give that God sows that grace – everywhere? Anywhere God can find eager, childlike, sowers of those seeds of grace God's love and grace are flung to the winds like seeds for a magic garden. God calls us, the church to take that gospel, that good news and fling it far and wide, here there and everywhere, regardless of where it falls, regardless of how it is received, regardless of who, in other words what kind of soil, it falls upon? If God doesn't discriminate – why should we? If God is carelessly extravagant – should we not be as well?

This summer between the Montreat Sr. High youth conference and the Massanetta Mid-hi youth conferences thousands and thousands of seeds have been sown in a most extravagant way. Conference leaders and preachers and keynoters and back home leaders have lavished these young people with the good news of God's grace, with a careless extravagance of God's grace poured

out, sown, without discrimination or limitation. This past week these words from Galatians were sown like seeds on the hearts and minds and into the ears of living soil – “But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ...for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.”

Because of faith we no longer need a disciplinarian. We no longer need on to provide constraint and control. In Christ we have been set free to be children of God through faith. We have been set free from notions of race or gender or social status because we are one in Christ. How does it change the paradigm of what we do? If our message is extravagance love rather than exclusion. If our message is extravagance mercy rather than intolerance and isolationism. If our message is extravagant grace rather than human condemnation of the other.

If the world is to be a more tolerable place, extravagant grace is a message we need to sow like a kid with a bag of seeds. It's THE message of a God whose supply of grace never runs out, is never

limited, never stops to worry about anything except for the sharing. It's God's extravagant way of sharing a blessing for a world that's ravenous for a pot of stew. God's extravagant grace exceeds the limits of reason or necessity. God's grace is supposed to be unbound in us. God find us and lavishes grace on us. When we've reached our limit and we've had all we can handle, there in the moment is God's extravagant grace. We find God in the taxi ride and in the gift of two rooms with a view and the enduring message of God when implanted seeds start to grow and the realization that God is real and calling blossoms in a young heart. Seeds are sown, God's extravagant grace is unlimited.

Not long after the boy sowed the seeds and he and his grandfather gently watered the seeds the boy came to a realization. He was leaving in just three days. How would he know how his seeds had grown? His grandfather promised he would see to the watering. His grandmother reminded him that it was God who made things grow. They told him that he had done his part. He had sown the seeds. Extravagantly. The rest was up to God.

From time to time his grandmother would send him pictures of the garden as various things began to grow. In a while, around harvest time, he received an 8 X 10 glossy color photo of his magic seed garden. It was a wonder to behold. There were flowers and melon vines and stalks of corn and other vegetables and

an incredible array of diverse, living, growing things. On the back, in large letters, his grandmother had written one word – Extravagant!