

Isaiah 55:10-13
Psalms 65: 9-14
Romans 8:1-11
Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

July 10, 2011
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I am not very good with dates and making appointments. I rely on my calendar. I cannot schedule anything without my calendar in hand-- because I overbook or forget what is coming up. Last winter when Elizabeth asked if I would do a couple sermons using the Godly Play lessons little did I realize that one of the sermons we selected would fall on the Sunday before VBS- Vacation Bible School!

And what is even more interesting is that the Epistle lesson today is the Parable of the Sower. And that is the theme I chose for VBS many months ago. I wish I could say this is all the result of meticulous planning, but that would not be true.

I think this is an example of synchronicity- defined as: an apparently meaningful coincidence in time of two or more similar or identical events. [1](#) The Parable of the Sower is apparently important for me to be studying and learning from. And perhaps it is no mere coincidence that we, children and adults alike, will be contemplating this parable throughout this week. So instead of retelling the story of the Parable of the Sower, I would like to share with you the each day's VBS theme related to this parable.

VBS starts on Tuesday. Tuesday's theme is: **God's love is a seed in me**. And our Epistle for today says: *You are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you.*

GOD'S LOVE is a SEED in ME. Inside every seed is a plant waiting to happen. There is a tiny root, stem and one or two tiny leaves. The seed has a hard shell, the seed cote. This cote must soften in order for the plant to burst forth from its confines and grow. The shell is lifeless, left over from an earlier time. What is the shell that prevents the seed of God's love in us from growing? I know that my shell often is fear- and lack of trust. Can you identify yours? The shell may have served as a protection at one point. And God's love in us may, at times, feel like a small seed, just a whisper, waiting to grow. In today's Psalm we heard:

*You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges;
with heavy rain you soften the ground and bless its increase. [2](#)*

The Second day of VBS, Wednesday, our theme is **Taking Root**. God's love takes root in each of us and is, indeed rooted in all of creation. How do we grow strong roots that can pull nutrients in and hold us strong? One of the children's books about roots says

"What do roots do for plants up above? They hold them up straight when the wind gives a shove. They hold them upright when the ground's on a slant, They hold them in place if you play on the plant."³

Strong roots are important, indeed.

I often start seeds in a sunny windowsill in our mudroom in late February or early March. I place them on a warming mat. I use good soil and water them carefully- for the first 2 weeks or so. Then life gets busy and soon I've forgotten to take care of the seedling. I've gone out to the mudroom to find the seedlings have gotten spindly with weak, shallow roots, or have even withered from lack of water. For the first time this year I remembered to keep them watered as they sprouted, and I soon discovered that the seedlings had outgrown their starting pots. With increasingly strong roots, God's love will **grow in** us, and **beyond** us- to be shared with others. This is what the mystery of Pentecost tells us. We are to keep God's amazing love growing in us. It will outgrow small containers. We become more expansive and loving as God's roots deepen and grow in us. Plant experts know that what we see of a plant is only half, or less of the whole plant. Half of a plant is underground in roots keeping the plant that we can see beautiful and green.

While Jesus was on the earth, the apostles were developing their first leaves and strengthening their roots. Jesus told the apostles to grow beyond their small group in order to share God's love. What are the ways we try to keep God's love contained and small? Can we let God's love grow us beyond our current level of comfort?

With strong roots we know that God will never leave us, we'll just get stronger and more vibrant!

The theme of Day 3 VBS (Thursday) is **God's Love helps us Face Challenges-** Have you ever pricked your finger on a rose thorn? Tiny, almost too small to see, that thorn hurts mightily. Sometimes it is all I can think about- get that thorn out! In our readings today, the rocky and thorny soil made it hard for the good seeds to grow. Thorns prick our skin when we try to pull them out of the soil. Rocks are difficult to clear. How many of you have ever raked rocks? They seem to multiply, and the job can be very frustrating. You just have to keep at it, with patience. We may feel overwhelmed or even in despair by the rocks and thorns in our lives. But the Parable of the Sower is clear. Jesus tells us if we hold on to our pain and frustration, God's Word will not find fertile soil in us. We will flee from trouble and will suffer more, having abandoned God. What are the rocks in your life right now? What are the thorns? Are you holding on to their pain? Let God's love help you face these challenges.

Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. [4](#)

God wants us to live in harmony, harmony within and without, and with everything in creation. The last day of VBS is **Living in Harmony**. When the Word is sown on good soil, it bears fruit. The fruit produces even more seeds. The Word spreads. I know that I, probably all of us, embody some rocky soil, some soil choked with thorns and we feel birds pluck at us. Yet I also know when I have nurtured good soil. My actions are then filled with God's love growing in me. The difference in how I feel is palpable. The rocks and thorns are gone, at least for a moment, and God's love has blossomed. I know you experience this as well. How amazing it would be to know God's love in this way even more often. I don't mean being some voice's

idea of being “good”, but being in true harmony with the love of God. This is the Parable of the Sower.

God’s seed of love in us, and the good soil we cultivate results in our ability to hear and know the Word of God. This is harmony for us, extends to each other and results in abundant fruit and great yields.

In the words of an 18th century Hymn:

Almighty God, your word is cast like seed upon the ground, /now let the dew of heaven descend and righteous fruits abound.

Let not our selfishness and hate this holy seed remove, /but let it root in every heart to bring forth fruits of love.

Let not the world's deceitful cares the rising plant destroy, /but let it yield a hundredfold the fruits of peace and joy. [5](#)

John Cawood

Please keep the VBS Volunteers and children in your prayers this week. And may all of us come to know God’s growing love within us and within in each other.

Ann H. Raymond

1. Dictionary.com- definition for synchronicity
2. Psalm 65: 11
3. *What Do Roots Do* by Kathleen V. Kudlinski,
4. Isaiah 55:13
5. *Almighty God, Thy Word is Cast*, John Cawood, 1775-1852 found on webpage, <http://www.edgeofenclosure.org/proper10a.html>