

## **“Time to Sow”**

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Please pray with me: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be faithful and pleasing to you, oh God, for you are our rock and our salvation. Amen.

The Old and New Testament lectionary scripture this morning is full of images of farming, gardening and planting. It has come a little late in the season, perhaps, if it weren't a metaphor for how we nurture people. As a metaphor, though, it seems timely. Since I have been thinking a lot about summer camps, I have been thinking about our young people and wondering what seeds we are planting among and within them right now. This is one of those moments in history that will mark itself on all of us and will affect the way our children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and neighbors grow up, and how they view the world. My parents tell stories of when they were in school. They had to have drills in case of a nuclear attack where they hid under their desks in a little ball, all the while knowing that this wouldn't help them at all if there were an actual nuclear attack. They now laugh now at the ridiculousness of what they were asked to do, while also sharing how it instilled in them a deep fear, helplessness, and a sense of an uncertain future.

My own children grew up right after 9-11 and during the time of many publicized school shootings. Only recently have I realized that, as a result, they and many kids of their generation, see the world as dangerous, untrustworthy, and uncertain. Some research studies suggest that this is part of the reason for the high anxiety and depression rates among our young people. I don't think any of us intended for our kids to have this worldview; it just sort of happened. And it makes me wonder: What seeds are we planting now? What seeds should we be planting and how should we cultivate them?

Sometimes in crises, we have a tendency to sow as the farmer does in our Gospel parable. That person seems to throw out seeds indiscriminately on all sorts of soil, hoping that the seeds will take root and grow up. That farmer doesn't seem to have a plan, since he doesn't protect the seeds from birds or make a raised bed on top of the rocky ground so that plants will grow. And there's no indication of what the farmer is planting—is it all one type of seed? Is he trying to grow root vegetables on the rocks or is he adjusting the seed for the environment? It seems that he's not doing that.

How about us? During this crisis, are we carefully planting seeds that will grow among the children?

I see at least three major elements of society coalescing right now in a way that our children cannot help but see: Covid, the current Civil Rights Movement, and the current political climate. All three of these could cause us to act in fear and anger. They could cause us to split the world into a simple Us versus Them so that we have someone to blame for our fear, and so that we can

focus our care on just the lives of a few. But doing this will plant seeds in our children and in ourselves that will likely lead to a more painful future.

So, instead, let's figure out the seeds we want to plant and an intentional method for cultivating them. The planting of seeds is about growing life—a life that will then nurture others: As Isaiah says, “Instead of the thorn,” we want the cypress. “Instead of the brier,” we want the myrtle. At such divisive and troubling times as these, in order to grow these life-giving plants, we need the intentional cultivation of courage, wisdom, and love.

We need to plant the seeds of courage because some parts of life right now are, frankly, scary. We know it's scary and so do our children, so it's important that we name these fears and then find the courage to face them. We need wisdom to temper and guide that courage, and to discern truth from fiction. For example, in the face of a viral pandemic, it is wise to follow the advice of epidemiologists and wear masks or avoid enclosed spaces. Doing otherwise is not a sign of courage. And we need seeds of love to keep us from falling into the Us vs. Them mentality. It is love that will help our children remember that we are all related—each of us is a beautiful and necessary part of one body—and love that will help us to act for the betterment of everyone.

So how do we plant and cultivate these seeds? You all know the answers, but I will focus on two things we can make intentional parts of our daily lives. For one thing, whenever we are around young people, we can model these virtues and talk about what we're doing. Tie what we're doing to our faith, so that our kids understand how both our faith and our God are involved in these virtues. Here are some things I've heard from others that seem like good seeds:

“I'm wearing a mask when I go to the store because Jesus has taught me to love my neighbor. I could be carrying the virus without knowing it and don't want to risk getting them sick.”

“I am not going to eat inside restaurants right now because science has shown that the virus is airborne and can spread just by people breathing. The book of Proverbs tells us, “Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is found in those who take advice. I think it's wise to pay attention to scientists.”

“I'm putting this Black Lives Matter sign in my yard because I love my neighbors of color and want them to know I support them. Yes, I am afraid that it could cause some people to get angry at me, but God helps give me courage, and hopefully I can have a conversation with them about it.”

“My sister told me something she heard on the radio about how states with longer stay home orders actually got sicker and destroyed their economy. I told her we need to use more wisdom to figure out what's real. Then I shared news stories with real statistics to help her see that the radio broadcast was wrong. I love my sister and am really uncomfortable with conflict, but the Gospel of Matthew has taught me that when I have a disagreement with someone, I need to talk

with them about it directly. It was a hard conversation, but it got both of us looking for more factual reporting.”

“I am really struggling with depression and anxiety right now. It took a lot of courage, but I got up this morning, made my bed, and cleaned my house. As I worked, I prayed, and I felt God’s presence helping me through my day.”

All of these actions model courage, wisdom, and love for neighbor and self. And we can see how, if our children follow these models themselves, they will bloom into life-giving, wise and courageous adults.

Another cultivation method I recommend has to do with media. I cannot stress enough how large an impact media and social media have on our young people right now. That media is bombarded with divisive ads, inaccurate information, and negativity. Neo-Nazi propaganda masquerades as moral, even Christian, messages. So now more than ever, we can cultivate the seeds of courage, wisdom and love that we plant by very intentionally guiding our young ones’ viewing, but by also talking with them everyday about what they’re seeing and hearing. We model wisdom and love by making the time to do this.

Dear Ones, we are always planting seeds in the minds and hearts of our children, affecting their unconscious behaviors for years to come. But some moments in their lives will stand out more than others, and this is one of those times. So, it’s time for us to sow, intentionally and carefully, in the hopes that the fruit will be bountiful, joyful, and life-giving to all. Amen.