

“Savoring Goodness”

Matthew 13:1-8, 18-23 & Galatians 5:22-23

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Prayer for Understanding Everpresent God, we praise you for being the bread of life. Nourish us, inspire us and enable us to share your life giving blessings with one another and the world. Amen

The good news of Matthew invites us to savor God’s extravagant goodness. **Matthew 13:1-8 and 18-23 NLT** “Later that same day Jesus left the house and sat beside the lake. A large crowd soon gathered around Jesus, so he got into a boat. Then Jesus sat there and taught as the people stood on the shore. Jesus told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: “Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As they scattered them across their field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they did not have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! “Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and do not understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they do not have deep roots, they do not last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God’s word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted! A harvest beyond their wildest dreams.”

Two surprising aspects of this parable are God, the farmer, is extravagantly generous spreading infinite goodness everywhere and our sharing of goodness multiples beyond our grandest imagination. The Apostle Paul describes the seeds as follows: **Galatians 5:22-23 NLT** “The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. **MSG** “God brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely. God is infinite in all these forms of goodness. God is graciously abundantly planting all these blessings in everyone’s life and in every aspect of the cosmos.

Most of Jesus’ parables have surprises, humor, and insights to enhance our life. Visualize the farmer with fun imagination. The farmer is joyful, strong, and generous. They have an embroidered, rainbow poncho that continuously replenishes seeds of goodness. Dancing along with a beaming smile the farmer flings seed everywhere. Some people by the Sea of Galilee probably laughed at the wild way that the farmer was throwing seeds all over the place.

New Testament professor Donald Juel explains: “The farmer in our story is not cautious. They throw seed everywhere, confident there will be a harvest in spite of the losses, believing growth will come everywhere. This parable illustrates the impact of Jesus teaching. Jesus teaches religious leaders who call him evil, disciples who struggle to understand, a person who cannot let go of their possessions and a child whose sharing feeds a multitude. Jesus sows goodness everywhere knowing most will be undiscovered. We are called to sow goodness like Jesus, lavishly, to everyone, with no worries, no yearning for a thank you, no expectation of results. We are to be joyful for the mere ability to wildly share goodness. Goodness is welcoming everyone. Goodness is unconditional love. Goodness is unlimited grace. Freely sow goodness everywhere.”

The four soils represents different ways one may receive God’s goodness. Some seeds fell on a path, and the birds came and ate them up. This represents the times when we do not receive God’s goodness. Perhaps abuse, tragedy or brutal circumstances have hardened one’s heart. Perhaps one believes they need to earn everything and reject seeds of grace. No matter how inhospitable, God keeps sowing goodness in their life. Why? Because ultimately everyone will discover the grace of God, receive God’s goodness and enjoy their glorious home with God and everyone forever. We also are the farmer. We also are to share goodness with

everyone. We are to sow goodness in everyone's life even those who reject our goodness. Seeds can be dormant for decades before sprouting. The goodness you share always expands the love of the cosmos, even if this side of heaven you do not see the impact of your giving. Even if a person's heart is as hard as a beaten path and they spew fear, hate and are violent we are still to plant goodness into their life.

Other seeds fell on rocky ground, but when the sun rose, they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away. This is an accurate description of several of my New Years' resolutions over my life. I decided to nurture a new good endeavor, but then I failed to live it. And God constantly keeps sowing goodness into our lives giving us infinite opportunities to become the loving person we aspire to be. And we are to keep loving everyone, even those who continually fail in implementing the love they receive.

Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. These seeds are crowded out by the worries of this life. I come from a long line of worriers. My mom would worry, then if something unfortunate happened she would say, "I told you that was going to happen." Sometimes she did express her worry in advance, however often I do not recall being advised to the misfortune. My sister is a silent worrier. After misfortune she would declare, "I knew that was going to happen." More than once, I have suggested she shares these known insights in advance. I limit how much news I consume otherwise my worry about people's wellbeing saps my energy. Typically, I consume news before I work out, so I can burn my worries away. Worry can dominate our thoughts, hinder our actions, make us indifferent or paralyze us. Worry is a thorny weed that constrains our goodness. Tend your life by pulling out your weeds of worry.

Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, a harvest beyond their wildest dreams. God multiplies for eternity every goodness we share.

Our life is transformed when we receive, nurture, and savor goodness. The spiritual practice of savoring involves intentionally slowing down to linger in pleasant experiences, sensations, or emotions. Savoring is feeling good about feeling good. Often I end my bike rides with an air high five for myself. Saying to myself, "James this is awesome you did something good for yourself." Savoring anchors you in the present moment, transforming ordinary daily tasks into opportunities for divine connection and gratitude. Savoring is awareness of simple goodness. I savor that I can walk with minimal pain. I did not realize how I took this for granted until I went through that painful season when every step was agonizing. Savoring is losing yourself in awe. Let the colors of a sunset permeate your essence. Allow music to animate your soul in dance. Immersing yourself in a sensation such as the warmth of sunlight, the aroma of a flower or the taste of a delicious meal. Savoring is basking, absorbing a compliment, cherishing a picture, or rereading a card. Savoring is breathing out negativity and breathing in the positive. Savoring is the practice of recognizing ordinary gifts and responding with deep, childlike gratitude. When eating a meal, walking, viewing art, slow down, take in the colors, smells, textures, tastes and sounds, use the senses of your soul to absorb God's cosmic goodness. Consciously look for good things in your day and allow yourself to sink into those positive emotions, imprinting them in your mind as an inner resource for difficult times. Align your energy by lingering in feelings of appreciation, compassion, and peace. Tune your spirit to the positive frequencies of the world. Savoring is the heartbeat of contemplation, a way to energetically embody God's loving presence. God is continuously sowing goodness everywhere. Savoring is perceiving through the clutter to receive goodness and share goodness yielding fruit beyond your grandest imagination. Savoring quiets the inner chaos, creating a space for God to surprise and delight you.

A savored biking. Before the ride, I do a centering prayer breathing out burdens and breathing in goodness. I give thanks for health, energy, the ability to ride and water. As I wash a Honeycrisp apple, I am grateful for the goodness of the earth, the apple tree, farmers, and all who served to enable me to enjoy an apple. As I start my ride, I go to a mental happy place, a lake in the mountains. As my creaky body warms up, I imagine I am flying. The wind massages my skin and dances around me. The trees form a lush green tunnel. I sing "Trees of the Field" as my soul listens to the trees clap their leaf hands. I cherish the fresh, earthy, woody aroma. I marvel in the majestic swimming of the swans serenaded by the frogs. I stop to sit on a bench in the shade of a willow tree by a pond. The sweet goodness of the apple rouses my taste buds to celebration. I imagine my joy expanding. I encourage my senses to wonder as to the smell, sight, sound, touch, taste, feel, sensations of joy. I bask in the brilliance of the vibrant blue of a bluejay. Bluejays remind me of my dad. I replay him teaching me to ride bike. I see my parent's delight as they gave me a red bike with handlebar tassels and a flame sticker by the back wheel. I relive the joy of the moment I discovered how to ride on my own. I sink into a fluffy cloud of peace. I imagine God delighting in my enjoyment of God's loving gifts to me. I smile as I savor goodness.

You are fertile soil that is yielding hundred fold fruits and goodness beyond your grandest dreams. Amen

