



# Poland Presbyterian Church

*At the Green since 1802*

2 Poland Manor  
Poland, Ohio 44514  
330-757-1547

## July 13, 2014 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The Rev. Robbin Del Nagro

### “Nurturing Nature”

I love to garden and always have since I was a young adult. Everywhere I move I plant a garden. Here in Poland we had our entire back yard turned into a garden with pathways and a dry stream, a pond and a bridge and raised beds for perennials. The landscaper was instructed to till and amend the soil with organic material and I watched the workers do this so I know it is good soil. Things should grow in it. For three consecutive years I have planted three poppies and three lupines. I plant in threes, not really because of the trinity but because of very practical reasons, such as, if something dies there are two more to propagate a new plant. But this is not necessarily true when it comes to poppies and lupines. The first poppies were planted by the landscaper. I told him my history with poppies and it came to pass – they turned brown and disappeared. A friend said her poppies were so abundant that they grew everywhere. She gave me some. I planted them in another place but they, too, turned brown and disappeared. This year I bought three poppies from the greenhouse I frequent. They each have a tiny bit of green left but are slowly turning brown and no doubt will disappear as well.

When my granddaughter was little I used to read her a book about a woman named Mrs. Rumphius who wanted to do one thing before she died to make the world a more beautiful place. She bought bags of lupine seeds and sowed them everywhere – in parks and alongside the roads, behind old buildings and in schoolyards - abundantly she sowed the seeds and they grew wherever she sowed them. I tried this first with lupine seeds. Then I tried plants and again am on my third try with lupines, in a different part of the garden – and again they are not thriving. I know I have good soil and I have watered and tended these plants but still I cannot keep them alive.

The sweet woodruff is happy and so is the digitalis, the veronica, yarrow, and Russian sage. In fact, most everything else is doing quite well. Why can't I have poppies and lupines?

I don't know the answer to this question but I like parables like the seed and the sower that make me think about God in terms I can understand from a gardening perspective. We have all heard this story many times, I imagine, but maybe we need to

look at it from new perspectives. You can take this parable and turn it around in dozens of different ways to try to understand what Jesus is getting at and any one of the conclusions reached might be the one. Here is what we know for sure. The sower was indiscriminate in sowing the seeds. This was not an unusual occurrence because in those days the seed was sown and THEN the soil was tilled. The seed was abundant. The sower did not hoard the seed because as we all know, seed doesn't last from season to season. So the seed landed wherever it landed. The miraculous thing about this is that the seed held such promise to begin with. With nurture the seed would multiply thirty fold and even a hundred fold to bring forth food to feed people. We might have thought that the sower was being wasteful with his seed but even some of the seeds that fell on rocky ground or thorn infested land sprouted and grew, despite the bad conditions. Not only seed that falls on good ground, but seed that falls on bad produces more than could be expected.

This is one of the few parables Jesus tells in which he goes on to explain what he means. Within each of our hearts there is good soil and bad. Sometimes the word of God that we hear or read takes root and multiplies beyond our wildest expectations. At other times it never has a chance. It gets choked out or like my poppies and lupines and roses, it doesn't develop deep roots.

We have been given abundant seed here at our church. We have resources way beyond what many churches in our midst have been given. And we are called to use these resources – not to hoard them and watch them diminish before us. We are called to be like the sower, a little bit reckless perhaps, but we are called to sow our seed without considering the soil on which it might land. We live in a different world today than thirty or fifty years ago. The people who come to church to hear the world might be church shopping or experiencing a time of crisis in their life. They might be coming for the sake of their children or they might be long time members who come no matter what the season. The seeds must be cast broadly to reach such a diverse population. That means we need to find new ways to say old things – perhaps through new music or the use of video technology. We will soon have our new video camera installed and will be video taping the worship so that those who are home bound or traveling can be with us. The next step is posting the worship service on the internet and live streaming it. But we must use our seed stores in order to have the necessary equipment to do this. We can't operate as if we might run out of seed tomorrow or think that what we are doing in new ways will fall on deaf ears. No, we need to expect the best outcomes available, no matter where our seed falls.

We know that today the seeds we sow may take awhile to sprout. We might see someone today and welcome them into our midst and not see them again for a couple of months. It doesn't mean we haven't sown the right seed. We sow seed not only on Sundays. We sow it with every personal contact we have with people every day of the week from answering the phone in the office to inviting our friends to Zumba. We sow it on our website and our face book page. We sow it in our pre-school and by opening our

doors to Boy Scouts and AA. We sow it by serving people at the Strawberry Festival and participating in the community ecumenical services. We need to sow seed not cautiously but relentlessly.

And after we sow the seed we need to nurture it. We need to nurture it by putting our best foot forward in everything we do, whether it is in the quality of our audio system that assures everyone will hear us on Sundays or the cleanliness and attractiveness of our restrooms. We nurture the seed through quality Bible study and book study groups, by providing fellowship opportunities in large groups and small. We nurture the seeds by being responsive to needs – in pastoral care, communications, and the way in which we welcome others.

If we nurture the seed the seedlings will develop deep root systems. Deep roots will hold us fast when we face difficulties or disagreements. Deep roots anchor us and feed us. Deep roots form us into intentional Christians who have the nourishment necessary to step out of our comfort zone and serve others. And when Gods' time is right those roots will bring new growth – flourishing leaves and rich, sweet fruit. In our reading from Isaiah we are told that God's word shall not return empty but shall accomplish that which God purposes and succeed in the thing for which God sent it. It is God who gives us the water and the seed and the sunshine. It is up to us to make the best of it with confidence that it will accomplish all that God purposes for it.

Nature is not just comprised of plant life, but also of animal life. We need to nurture both. Today we are going to bless pets. If you have been to our home you have met our schnauzers, Alfie and Angel. Everyone always tells us how good they are – how well behaved. We call them the schnauzers who don't do anything. They are rescue schnauzers and we adopted them about two years ago. Alfie had been in a puppy mill in Tennessee. He was found with about 21 other small dogs – Lhasa apsos and min pins – crowded together in a little shed – underfed and without any kind of shots or medical attention ever given. Four of those dogs had to be put down due to heart worms and cancer, but Alfie survived. He had never been trained and so the slow process began. When we got him after he had gone from rescue to foster home for socialization he was still one scared pup. He was afraid to cross thresholds to go through doorways and he cowered whenever he encountered a dog larger than himself. He had this cute way of putting his paw out when he was frightened but we soon learned that this was an anxiety response called “paw lifting” and not at all desirable. Alfie was so anxious when we first got him that he chewed everything in sight. We reupholstered the arms of two chairs twice. He still chews through stereo wire if left alone at all. He seems to feel safest going into his crate which we leave out for him with the door open. Its like a little man cave.

When I came home one day to see down everywhere after Alfie had chewed up his special orthopedically designed bed, we decided it was time to find him a companion. We found Angel through a different schnauzer rescue site. She was really cute but about

the worst companion we could have found. She was about three years older and we don't really know her story. I suspect she was just neglected as she had bad teeth. She is the most introverted dog I have ever known. In fact, sometimes we think she must have been raised with cats because she has so many catlike traits. She will never come when called or show any emotion whatsoever. She curls up at the top of the sofa during the day to soak in the sun just like a cat would. But at night she situates herself right between Peter and I and last night after I had gently put her at the foot of the bed, I said to Peter, "There is a dog on my head." She crawls up to the top of my pillow just as if it were the sofa.

With nurture and love these two creatures of God have come a long way. They have become what visitors call "good dogs." They walk on leashes now although they flunked the rest of their dog training class. They don't run away. And they love us with such an extravagant love that we could ask for nothing more. Alfie licks my face in the morning to let me know it is 5:30 and time to get up, but hey, now I don't need an alarm clock.

Maybe the lesson for me about the poppies and the lupines and the rescue dogs is that there are lots of factors that go into nurturing healthy plants and animals. Maybe my garden is just not the right place to grow poppies and lupines. We need to nurture all of nature – our pets and our gardens for these are great gifts. But we also need to nurture one another. God is not finished with us yet. Somebody sowed the seed from which we became who we are in Christ. Whether that seed fell on a thorny heart or a warm and fuzzy one we need to nurture it because we know that good seed will always sprout in God's time. Good seed will produce abundantly if we give that seed what it needs to grow into what God intended it to be.