

"The Wisdom of Insecurity"
A Sermon delivered by Rev. John Balicki
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, July 12, 2026
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Wilton, Maine

There have been thousands if not millions of sermons preached on the well known parable of the sower and the seed so one minister down in Kentucky decided that a visual demonstration would add emphasis to his Sunday sermon about growing in good soil. He placed four worms into four separate jars. The first worm was put into a container of Kentucky bourbon. The second worm was put into a container that had captured cigarette smoke. The third worm was put into a container of rich Hershey's chocolate syrup. The fourth worm was put into a container of good clean soil.

At the conclusion of the sermon, the minister reported the following results:

The first worm in the bourbon: **Dead.**

The second worm in cigarette smoke: **Dead.**

The third worm in chocolate syrup: **Dead.**

The fourth worm in good clean soil: **Alive!!**

So the minister asked the congregation, "What can we learn from this demonstration?"

A little old woman in the back quickly raised her hand and answered,

"As long as you drink, smoke, and eat chocolate, you won't have worms!"

Perhaps this morning we need to be like the little old woman and find a new interpretation to this parable because how many of you tuned me out after the first sentences? Oh yeah, parable of the sower and the seed, heard that one before, be like good soil and let the word of God grow richly in you. Amen. Let's move on now it's getting warm in here.

Now I'm not sure how many of you have had experience farming but I know there are a lot of gardeners out there and don't you think that our sower in the parable was a bit of a knucklehead? I mean why sow seed on a path, on rocky ground, among thorns? When you plant your garden do you take your seeds and fling them across your driveway, or "dooryahd" as we say here in Maine? Do you throw them anywhere else they're not likely to grow?

Our experienced gardeners here will tell us though that any type of planting is an enterprise with a high degree of chance and uncertainty. The sower is scattering seed

with no guarantees . Will anything grow? Will the conditions be right? Will there be disease, pests, or catastrophes that will take the crop? While farming has always involved a high degree of uncertainty, in our own time climate change has increased this reality. Weather patterns are more unpredictable; temperatures are more extreme; the environment as a whole is less secure. Uncertainty is the name of the game.

In 1951, the philosopher Alan Watts published, “The Wisdom of Insecurity”. His main point was that in an age of unprecedented anxiety – we must embrace the present and live fully in the now in order to live a fulfilling life. Spending all our time trying to anticipate and plan for the future and in lamenting the past, we forget to embrace the here and now. We are so concerned with tomorrow that we forget to enjoy today.

Our sower in the parable seems to have adapted this principle and the experienced farmers and gardeners are all saying why bother throwing good seed on paths and rocks and thorns? Why bother?

But what if God really was like that with us? What if God only planted when a harvest was assured? Perhaps God would never plant at all. Maybe the wisdom of insecurity invites us to sow regardless, to cast out the seeds without guarantees. Maybe we need to cultivate a willingness to be surprised, to invite response even if response is not likely to be forthcoming. Maybe the invitation is more important than the end result.

Has anyone ever written you off as rocky ground, a place of thorns? “He’s a bad apple”. “That family is no good”. “That person will never make anything out of themselves”. Or maybe if not your general character, then some quality or skill: “you can’t throw a ball”, “he couldn’t boil water”, “she can’t even hammer a nail”, “you’ll never learn to pass algebra”.

But the parable invites other perspectives – not only that of the sower. If we pause to consider the position of the seed in each of these environments, we might notice the precarity of the rocky ground, how hard it is to grow when the conditions are set against you. Maybe the seed is trampled on or plucked up suddenly by a bird. Maybe no one ever cared enough to take the time to teach you how to throw a ball, to make a simple meal for yourself, how to plant a small vegetable garden.

Finally imagine being the harvest. I've yielded a hundredfold. Or maybe just sixty...or thirty. But any yield at all feels like a victory in these conditions. "I threw the ball, three tomato plants have grown in my garden, I got a C in algebra".

The point is that these organic metaphors, this kind of storytelling, exercises our human capacity to empathize — to extend our experience into the experience of someone or something else. As we empathize, we also see ourselves in new ways. As we enter into many aspects of our own experience as human beings, we can begin to intuit how we might have "ears to hear."

Ears to hear mean having the ears to hear someone else's story, to understand they or some aspect of themselves grew up on the path, in the thorns, on the rocks. Maybe life was a challenge but maybe there was also a harvest.

Helen Keller said, *"Life is either a daring adventure or nothing. Security does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it."*

Lauren Butler writes, *"All successful life is adaptable, opportunistic, tenacious, interconnected, and fecund."*

In the parable of the sower and the seed, perhaps there is a similar perception. In the midst of uncertainty, confronted with rocky, thorny, hard terrain within and without, can we be as wildly opportunistic and openhearted as the sower, as adaptable as the seed, as tenacious as the earth itself? Can we let insecurity sow wisdom in us?