

St. James Sermon – Seeds – October 28, 2018
Rev. Emily Livingston

2 Corin 9:9-13 CEV (Contemporary English Version)

⁹ The Scriptures say,

“God freely gives his gifts
to the poor,
and always does right.”

¹⁰ God gives seed to farmers and provides everyone with food. He will increase what you have, so that you can give even more to those in need.

¹¹ You will be blessed in every way, and you will be able to keep on being generous. Then many people will thank God when we deliver your gift.

¹² What you are doing is much more than a service that supplies God’s people with what they need. It is something that will make many others thank God.

¹³ The way in which you have proved yourselves by this service will bring honor and praise to God. You believed the message about Christ, and you obeyed it by sharing generously with God’s people and with everyone else.

Good Morning! I want to first begin by extending greetings to you from Living Water UCC and my thanks to Pastor Lynn for inviting me today. It's a joy and a blessing to be here with you.

I understand that you are in the midst of a series related to your new church logo – which is beautiful – and that you're in your 3rd week today.

So, in case anyone wasn't here last week or the week before last, I'll give a brief overview of the sermon topics. The series began two weeks ago with a sermon on "Trees," which is the central part of your new logo. Last week, the sermon was about shapes in the logo – the triangle, circle and outer ring. This week, we will look at Seeds.

In preparing for this message, I looked at your logo. And one of the things I really like about it is that there's a great deal of meaning within the design that allows for personal interpretation. When I read the details about your new logo I appreciated the section on leaves:

It reads... "A simple pointed oblong creates a leaf....The shape also evokes a seed, and the fruit from which the seed comes; thus all the meanings in fruits of our labor, and the seeds of peace and justice that we sow in our many outreach and service projects."

So, when I looked at the logo again with this understanding, that the pointed oblongs could be seeds...I said, WOW...there's a lot of seeds here. When I counted the number of "free-floating" seeds, there are 40. Did you know that? 40 is such an important number in the Bible. Aside from the obvious meaning of "a very long time"; the number 40 can be a period of testing or preparation before a major event. It also can be a general term for a generation. It appears in 146 verses.

Here are a few of the major events where the number "40" comes up:

- Moses was on Mt. Sinai for 40 days and nights on two separate occasions when God gave him the Law

- The children of Israel were punished by wandering the wilderness for 40 years before a new generation was allowed to possess the promised land.
- God flooded the Earth for 40 days and nights
- Jesus fasted 40 days and nights in the wilderness before his public ministry began
- The first three kings of Israel: Saul, David and Solomon ruled for 40 years.

When you hear this St. James, and I'm not looking for you to answer this, are you in a time of preparation? Is God working with you and through you to take you to your next place in ministry??

The passage for today come from 2 Corinthians. The wider context of the passage relates to giving and actually, chapters 8 and 9 of this letter are the longest discussion of the principles and practice of giving in the New Testament. Paul is encouraging them to give and to give cheerfully. He's encouraging them to be generous because giving blesses both the giver and the recipient.

There's another thing that Paul is trying to get them to understand and that can be seen in vs 10 & 11. There's a divine principle at work that changes the rate of return from your giving. God exponentially increases your blessings and your ability to give, the more you give, when you give with a cheerful heart that is not seeking something in return.

Related to a farmer, the more seeds the farmer sows, the more crops are grown and with God, the farmer continues to receive more and more seeds to sow. There's a wonderful cycle that takes place where God continues to bless the farmer with more seeds; consequently, more seeds are planted which means that more crops can grow, and the more crops that grow, the more people in the wider community are blessed because there is an ever-present harvest.

¹⁰ God gives seed to farmers and provides everyone with food. He will increase what you have, so that you can give even more to those in need.

¹¹ You will be blessed in every way, and you will be able to keep on being generous.

When I was reading this particular interpretation of the text, I thought about my great-grandfather. He was a farmer. He didn't have a lot of money, he had about 15 acres – but with his farming practice, his skills, his respect for the Earth, his understanding of sowing and harvest, he was able to provide for seven children, his wife, and 4 grand-children that he and my great-grandmother helped to raise. And they never had a day without food. He wasn't a wealthy man but they had what they needed. And they had more than enough food to help other people in their community put food on their tables.

So when I think about this and think about the work that he put in and the more crops he planted, and the increasing harvest he had time and time again, there was this ripple effect. He was able to bless and be blessed over and over. See God's way of multiplying our giving frees us from the mindset and shackles of scarcity and fear. It's understandable to have fear because of uncertainty and to believe that there's just not "enough to go around" when we see what's happening in the world today.

But, there is no lack in God. God is FULL...full of mercy, love, grace, and every good thing. God gives to us freely because God so loves us. God's desire is for us to have what we need and God delights in blessing us with additional gifts. When we trust that we can give freely to God, this principle of multiplication is activated and it begins to take hold in our lives. The more we give to God, the more we receive; and the more we receive, the more we are blessed to be a blessing to someone else.

When I look at the logo again from the perspective of a farmer, I see a lot of seeds and one seed is powerful. A seed is an amazing creation of God. Inside every seed is a tremendous amount of energy and a blueprint for its life. God designed seeds to develop and grow with power to overcome challenges in their early stages of growth. For some seeds from flowering plants, the life cycle begins once the plant it originated from dies. From this death of the mature plant, new life continues through the seed.

Here's basic info related to seeds and their biology and growth:

- Seeds are formed in the center part of a flower or in the fruit. Fruits come from flowers.

- Seeds come in many shapes and sizes.
- Plants grow from seeds.
- If a seed receives water and gets warm, the baby plant (embryo) inside it starts to grow.
- The process of a baby plant beginning to grow is called germination.

There's an interesting true story about ancient seeds that were found near the ruins of King Herod's palace in an area by the Masada fortress in Southern Israel. In 1963, archeologists found a clay jar and inside the jar were date palm seeds. Carbon dating estimated their origin from 155 BC to 64 AD – so they were around 2000 years old. Scientists preserved the seeds and in 2005, Dr. Elaine Solowey planted 3 of those seeds. One of the seeds sprouted and today stands a thriving date palm tree in Israel named after Noah's grandfather and the oldest man who lived in the Bible -- Methuselah. And what a fitting name, because they eventually discovered that Methuselah is a male tree. How amazing is our Creator God!!! Seeds from 2000 years ago still have the awesome spark of life in them to flourish and to grow after being buried and dormant for so many years and they are able to reproduce and create new life.

There are many other reasons that some seeds are dormant. It could be that the temperatures haven't gotten warm enough or for a long enough period of time for the seeds to grow. It could be because there hasn't been enough water. If you feel you may be in a dormant stage right now -- just like the seeds of the Methuselah tree in a buried clay jar -- know that you are packed with amazing potential and still have the spark of Christ in you. God is still speaking and God is still working!! So be encouraged and be fruitful like that Methuselah tree which is thriving now after 2000 years of existence.

There are 40 seeds in your logo and those seeds can go a long way. As you begin to plant each of those 40 seeds, God will unlock the principle of multiplication and you can experience exponential growth in whatever area of your life that you are seeking. Each of you who are members at St. James are farmers. Plant the seeds that you have been given, trust God, and know that God will continue to give you more and more seeds to plant. Watch the crops grow and thank God for the harvest. It will be a blessing... not just to you, but to a hungry world that is starving for what St. James has offer. There's an amazing amount of power in just one seed. There's no limit to what God can do with 40!!