

“Just Sow the Seeds”

Date: February 2, 2020

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Luke 8:1-15

Occasion: Invitational Evangelism, series

Themes: Witnessing, evangelism, faith-sharing

(Take a bite of apple and chew it, then ask) What do you know about Johnny Appleseed? I didn't know very much until I did a little research. I knew the legend, how he wandered across our country planting apple trees wherever he went. But when I did a little more research, I was fascinated.

From the Wikipedia website I learned: John Chapman was born on September 26, 1774 and lived until March 18, 1845. He was an American pioneer who introduced apple trees to large parts of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Ontario, as well as the northern counties of present-day West Virginia.

There are stories of Johnny Appleseed practicing his nursery craft in the area of Wilkes-Barre, PA. Another story has Chapman living in Pittsburgh on Grant's Hill in 1794 at the time of the Whiskey Rebellion. The popular image is of Johnny spreading apple seeds randomly everywhere he went.

In fact, he planted nurseries rather than orchards. He built fences around them to protect them from livestock and he would leave the nurseries in the care of a neighbor and returned every year or two to tend the nursery.

Here's some local lore that may be of interest to some of you. He planted his first nursery on the bank of the Brokenstraw Creek, south of Warren, PA. I've kayaked that stream. Next, he seems to have moved to Venango, down in Crawford County, along the shore of French Creek.

How about that?! I'll bet you didn't know Johnny Appleseed was a local legend.

What's that got to do with Jesus, the Gospel, and you and me? Well, plenty. Johnny Appleseed knew that if you wanted a harvest, you had to plant the seeds. Jesus told his disciples, and he tells you and me, that you have to share the gospel with other people if you expect the Kingdom of God to grow.

In fact, Jesus told the parable about the sower just to encourage his disciples. He wanted them to know that wherever they went, teaching and preaching in his name, they would get mixed results. Some people, when they hear the gospel will be like rock hard soil; they will reject it. Don't be surprised. Some people will seem real interested at first, but when life gets busy or life gets hard, they will give up their faith. Don't be discouraged.

However, there will be some who will hear the good news, and the seeds of faith will take root in their hearts. And they will grow strong in their faith, serving the Lord, and producing fruit that will yield even more disciples for Jesus.

In essence, Jesus was telling his disciples and us, that it's our job to sow the seeds. Don't worry about the end result; that's God's responsibility. Paul said, "Some of you will plant seeds, some of you will water the seeds, and some of you will get to see the crop blossom and bear fruit. Don't worry about who gets the credit."

That's what the passage from 1 Corinthians is telling us. We all play a part in helping another come to faith. Don't worry about the results, just sow the seed. Leave the results to God. Simply sow the seed.

For the past several weeks we have been talking about intentional faith development. We're going to switch gears today and spend the next

couple of weeks talking about evangelism, or witnessing, or faith-sharing; whatever you wish to call it.

What comes to mind when you hear the word *evangelism*? For many people the term *evangelism* has a bad reputation because of the way it has been abused by mean-spirited preachers and manipulative politicians. Others are intimidated by the idea of sharing their faith. For others, they believe faith in Christ is a private affair and not to be shared with others.

In spite of our hesitations, the New Testament is clear that we are called to share the good news of what God has done in Christ with others. Jesus' last command was to go into all the world and make disciples of all people. When we join the UM Church, in our membership vows, we promise to participate in the mission of the church through our witness.

Now, United Methodists, we share the gospel without cramming religious truism down people's throats, or hitting them over the head with contrived clichés, or shouting condemnation from the street corners. Instead, we share the gospel in the spirit of love and grace, which are at the center of our Wesleyan tradition.

There are lots of different ways of sharing our faith, and we'll talk about some of those in the coming weeks. We all have different personalities. Some are quiet and shy – simply sow the seed. Some like to argue theology and philosophy – simply sow the seed. Some share their faith through service to others – simply sow the seed.

Some of us feel inadequate to the task. This sermon is meant especially for you. Simply sow the seed. Don't worry about the results. Leave the results to God. Be faithful; do what God asks you to do. Simply sow the seed.

Some of us worry about how we'll look – that somehow we're going to embarrass God by doing it wrong. Let me tell you this – words sincerely shared from the heart, not crafted in any special way, when blessed by the Holy Spirit, have more power to convict and change hearts than the most eloquent sermon crafted with perfect theology. Simply sow the seed.

Some of us are afraid of offending our friends by talking about religion. Share from your heart; tell the story of what God has done for you and why you choose to believe. You're not afraid to tell them which movies you like to watch. Simply sow the seed.

Other people are afraid their friends will ask questions they can't answer. Maybe it's a question you have too, and you don't know the answer. Tell them honestly, "I've struggled with that too. I don't know how to answer your question. All I know is this is what God has done for me." Simply sow the seed.

Don't try to win arguments; don't try to impress people with your knowledge. Be a Johnny Appleseed for Jesus. Wherever you go, simply sow the seed. Speak a good word about what God is doing in your life.

How has God's love and grace made a difference in your life?

Why is being a part of a church important to you? What do you get out of it?

How has God's love transformed your life?

How has your faith sustained you during hard times?

Pay attention to what's happening in your life. Notice when you see God at work, and don't be afraid to tell a friend about it.

Just sow the seed. The results belong to God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Our job is simply to sow the seed. Amen? Amen!