



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

November 1, 2015

# What You Sow

Dr. Jim Gilchrist

# **What You Sow**

Dr. Jim Gilchrist

© 2015 by Dr. Jim Gilchrist and Westminster Presbyterian Church.

All rights reserved.

No part of this sermon may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: November 6, 2015

*Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right; for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith (Galatians 6:7-10).*

It's November, and our sanctuary is decorated for this traditional season of harvest and thanksgiving for all God's gifts. The Bible is full of images of sowing and reaping, which you might expect, since it was written in a predominantly agricultural society. We don't grow much of our own food these days, but we know a few things about seeds, so I want to reflect this morning about the things we sow with our lives, and what we can expect to reap as a result.

We know, for example, that every seed produces its own kind of plant. A song from *The Fantasticks*, the world's longest-running musical, says:

Plant a radish.  
Get a radish.  
Never any doubt.  
That's why I love vegetables;  
You know what you're about!

The seeds we plant determine what comes up later on. We reap what we sow, for better and for worse, in the garden and in life. Plant a radish, get a radish. Plant compassion, get compassion. Plant thoughtfulness and love, get more thoughtfulness and love. On the other hand, plant selfishness and greed and you get more selfishness and greed. We reap what we sow, as people tend to become

whatever gets planted inside them.

Which points to another thing about plants: namely, that you can tell a tree by its fruit. If you're an apple tree you ought to be producing apples, and the right kind of apples at that. A tree that yields no fruit is not much good, and a tree that's supposed to be Red Delicious but grows only crab apples is not much good either. Jesus says a farmer will chop down a tree that doesn't bear good fruit, and as if to make the point he causes a fruitless fig tree to wither on his way into Jerusalem. It's not what a person claims to be, but what he or she does that matters. You'll know them by their fruits, Jesus says.

Seeds are little things that turn into much bigger things. You can barely see a mustard seed, but it turns into a tree ten feet tall. And the seeds of our behavior grow into big things too. Sow the wind and you'll reap a whirlwind, the prophet Hosea says. A hundred and one years ago an assassin killed Archduke Ferdinand and started World War I, which in turn planted the seeds of World War II. But the same principle works in the opposite direction as well. The kingdom of heaven is like that too, Jesus says. So he rounds up a handful of unpromising disciples, a rather motley crew, and he plants the seed of the Spirit within them, and today the church of Jesus Christ has something like two and a half billion members.

This is All Saints' Day, which reminds us that the seeds of faith planted by one generation will turn into the faithful congregation of the next generation. You and I are here because our parents, or our Sunday school teachers, or somebody else who cared about us shared the good news of God's love with us, and we saw that it was good, and we wanted it for ourselves and for those we love. Our children's

generation will become faithful too, but only if we plant the seeds of faith within them, and only if our lives bear the kind of fruit that can feed a hungry world. Young people today want nothing to do with a church that's all talk and no action, but the world is hungry for the kind of fruitful living that our faith can offer.

Another thing about seeds is that they have everything they need to turn into whatever they're meant to be, even though the seeds themselves look nothing like what they will become. An acorn looks nothing like an oak tree, though mighty oaks from little acorns proverbially grow. You never know when some little act of kindness or courage or faithful sacrifice will help to produce a kind and courageous and faithful leader later on.

The whole idea of seeds is that God has built a kind of creativity into the earth itself. It's no coincidence that the story of Adam and Eve puts the first man and woman in a garden, where God tells them to tend and grow and take care of things. God gives the growth, but we human beings are stewards of creation, charged with the privilege and awesome responsibility of caring for God's great garden.

Still another thing about seeds is that they take a while to turn into whatever they're meant to become. This time of year we put seeds in the ground, but we don't expect to see any more of them until spring. For months it will seem as if nothing at all has come of our efforts. And there's another image of life itself. Teachers and ministers are among those who never quite know what will come of the seeds we plant, because people take a long time to grow and mature. Parents have that experience too. Day after day you take care of your children, and do what you can to guide them, but it's a long time before you know how they're going

to turn out. In that same song from *The Fantasticks* a father says that vegetables are dependable,

While with children,  
It's bewilderin'.  
You don't know until the seed is nearly grown  
Just what you've sown.

So we have to be patient with one another, as God is patient with all of us, because it takes time for the seed of the Spirit to germinate and grow within us.

One more thing about seeds. When you're sowing good seed, the yield you get depends on how much you sow. "The point is this," Paul tells the Corinthians: "the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

Sometimes in stewardship sermons the preacher's pitch is that you'll get back so much more than you gave, as if the whole point was some sort of return on investment. There's a long tradition of the Prosperity Gospel in America that's basically an appeal to self-interest dressed up in Christian costume, but it appeals to all the wrong things. It reinforces selfishness instead of generosity. As Paul says to the Galatians, if you sow to the flesh you reap the corruptions of the flesh, but if you sow to the Spirit you'll reap the things of the Spirit. Your soul will grow fit for the kingdom of heaven.

I think that's what Jesus means when he says that to those who have, more will be given, and from those who have little, even what they have will be taken away. Obviously he's not talking about financial security. Whenever we think Jesus is saying something unfair or nonsensical,

that tells us more about our own assumptions than about his. I think Jesus is simply reminding us that what we practice is what we become better at, like learning a language or playing an instrument. The more we cultivate the things of the Spirit, the more deeply spiritual we become; and the more we neglect the things of the Spirit, the more we lose what little spirituality we had. So he says, “Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you.”

You reap what you sow, the Bible says. So watch what’s in your seed bag. Be careful what kinds of seeds you spread around, since little things turn into big things, for better and for worse. It may take a while, but the seeds we plant in one another and cultivate within ourselves will turn into the souls we become for all eternity.

Those who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind. But those who sow the seeds of the Spirit will reap the kingdom of God. And if it’s kingdom seeds we’re sowing, we’ll want to sow them as widely and generously as we can, just as God so graciously sows the seeds of heaven among us.





**WESTMINSTER**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2040 Washington Road  
Pittsburgh, PA 15241  
412-835-6630

[www.westminster-church.org](http://www.westminster-church.org)