

A House Divided

July 12, 2026

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Green

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

I can't seem to master the art of growing bountiful rows of vegetables and meadows of bee-friendly wildflowers.

My farmer neighbors tell me that my problem is I can't throw seeds down and expect success. Growing something beautiful takes some elbow grease — and education. Starting with understanding what type of soil I have. Is it clay, sand, silt or peat?

Truthfully, I have no idea what language they are speaking. I've tried studying up on soil. I even purchased testers to see what I need to amend my soil with. Still, I can't seem to understand the science of the nutrients needed to help various plants grow.

This I do know: My soil is extremely rocky, so any hopes of growing blue-ribbon winning straight carrots are dashed. Rather than deal with the soil I have, I opted for raised beds. But they aren't the carefree option I thought them to be. Even the "good" soil I put into the beds needs care.

My challenges with soil have made me better understand Jesus' Parable of the Sower.

When Jesus wanted to make his point about what it meant to grow in God's Word and till the Kingdom here on Earth, he used soil as a metaphor for the conditions of our heart — where the seeds of justice and love grow.

First, there was soil on a path that the Sower threw the seeds on. Being it was a path; the birds easily saw the seeds, swooped in and gobbled them up. The seeds had no chance of taking root.

Next, there was the rocky soil. The seeds did begin to grow, but the roots could only go so deep, making the plants easily uprooted. And may I add, making carrots wonky.

Then the Sower threw seeds amid the thorns, where they were soon choked by the overgrowth. Finally, the Sower's seeds fell upon good soil where they produced a bountiful yield.

We are all being asked today by Jesus to assess the soil of our hearts. Where are the seeds of faithfulness falling? Are they scattering on safe, well-worn paths that will not lead to deep growth? Are they falling in rocky ground where the roots will not reach deep enough to withstand droughts or even deluges? What about those thorns of distractions and busyness in our overgrown gardens of life? Are they choking our commitment to following in the ways of Christ?

Be honest with your assessment because, as I have learned the hard way, ignoring what needs to be amended doesn't get you the beautiful abundant life God wants for you.

God of green pastures, rich soil and abundant crops, help us to be honest with You about the condition of our heart soil. May we admit where we are failing in the growth of Your Word here in our own lives and communities. And then, may we be willing to amend our ways so that truly a garden of hope and peace will flourish. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

(Rev. Donna Frischknecht Jackson is a communications specialist for the United Church of Christ and author of today's *Sunday Bulletin*.)