

## “Sowing Seeds of Understanding”

February 5, 2023

Rev. Ann Eichhorn



### Readings

#### Matthew 13:1-13

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat there; and the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying “A sower went out to sow, and as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell upon thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.

#### Matthew 13:10, 13

Then the Disciples came and asked him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” And he answered them.... “This is why I speak to them in parables, because ‘seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.’”

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[Most of today’s service was comprised of a dialogue between Rev. Ann and our guest, Devin Fromer, a young man of biracial heritage. The following was offered by Ann prior to her conversation with Devin.]

One of the primary tasks of a “bridge minister” is to provide links to the past: who we *were* as a community, the present: who we are *now* as we prepare ourselves to receive a new minister, and the *future*: who we hope to become. We are to help prepare both the congregation and the new leadership for the future that awaits us. Keeping watch and checking the pulse of the congregation helps connect us with our larger world and its impact on us. That said, it seems to me that as a nation, a congregation, and for each of us personally, we could use more knowledge, information, and experiences that inform and perhaps challenge some of our understandings where these understandings came from.

I want to note that February is Black History month – a time to honor significant achievements of Black America. The Red Cross commemorates this month with the theme “Black excellence is in our blood,” and they acknowledge the vital role of blood donations from Blacks in meeting the broader transfusion need of patients and in particular those with sickle cell disease. It is estimated that over 100,000 people, mostly of African descent, have sickle cell disease and may require regular blood transfusions to help manage their disease. One in three Black donors is a match for such patients. They are part of the responders to the reality that every two second, someone in the United States needs blood.

I would like to say a few words about today’s readings. When Jesus used the parable of the sower and the seeds, he was trying to help his followers understand how they could help bring about a better existence for one another. They needed to understand what the seeds represented, what was meant by the reference to the kinds of soil in which the seeds were planted, the elements that played a part in whether the seeds were able to take root, and the tending it takes to bring seeds to fruition. If we look at this parable, we can see ways in which it connects to our realities today. If we go back just to January 1<sup>st</sup> of this year, we can see signs that the seeds of justice, equality, compassion, and truth are showing evidence of disappearing in the wind. We have been exposed again and again to the power of unleashed evil, and the question keeps surfacing: *how can we – especially as Christians – hear and respond to these realities?* Who is sowing seeds of justice, peace, love, and the principles of the Golden Rule, and tending to them in ways that allow them to take root and grow?

I sent for a book of readings for Lent and Easter, and have been making my way through it, watching for material that could be used in group discussions and in messages. I was struck this week by a reading from the Danish theologian, poet, and religious author Soren Kierkegaard, considered to be the first existentialist philosopher. He states:

It is well known that Christ consistently used the expression “followers,” not adherents of a teaching, but followers of the life of Christ. He could never be satisfied with adherents who accepted his teachings, especially with those who in their lives ignored it or just let things take their usual course. His whole life on earth, from beginning to end, was destined solely to have followers and to make admirers impossible.

Kierkegaard defined a follower as one who is or strives to be what he or she admires. An admirer, however, keeps him- or herself personally detached. To admire rather than to follow Christ is not necessarily an activity of bad people. It is done by those who keep themselves detached, at a safe distance, as might an audience watching an actor on the stage while they sit in the theater, safe and calm. Admirers are willing to serve Christ as long as proper caution is exercised lest they come in contact with danger. When there is no danger, when there is a dead calm, when everything is favorable to our Christianity, then it is all too easy to confuse an admirer with a follower. Admirers always play it safe. The follower aspires with all his or her personal strength to *be* what he or she admires, and in so doing, incurs the possibility of encountering certain perils.

We will hear this morning from a young man about why he and his friend worked for over three years to write, produce and release a film which chronicles their journey to become followers of truth, advocates for justice and equality, and to find new ways to communicate and understand the hard realities they experience every day, with eyes open and ears listening for movement towards peaceful living. Devin says their movie “Bus 233” is a bit autobiographical, and brings the visual and visceral into view in the search for understanding and change. Devin’s parents, Reed and Gina, are an interracial couple who have parented eight children, of whom Devin is the youngest of the boys. He has a seven-month old new little sister. His Father is a long-time pianist for an African American church in Hunter’s Point, where his mother helped establish a food bank years ago. He graduated two years ago from San Rafael High School, and grew up in white-dominated Marin.

[Following are some of the questions Ann asked Devin.]

1. Tell us a bit about the film itself, and how you wanted to convey how you experience people looking and reacting to you.
2. When did you get the idea for making a movie and decide on the story to tell?
3. What were you looking for in the characters you wrote into the story?
4. How does it feel to be a biracial person between two worlds?
5. How and why did it feel “boring” to grow up here? What were you looking for? Did you find it anywhere?
6. How is college for many biracial students similar to their high school experiences?

