

**"Miracle Grow"**  
**Matt 13:1-9 & 18-23**

First Congregational Church of East Hartford  
July 13, 2014 (Candidating Weekend)  
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[Reading of the Gospel]

PRAYER

Do we have any gardeners in the house today?

You know that fertile soil is filled with a mixed bag of nutrients:  
nitrogen, phosphate, etc. ???

It takes more than simple dirt to grow a plant.

It takes more than one seed to yield abundant growth.

Jesus even talks about how growth requires freedom from thorns and hungry birds.

In fact, it takes a whole eco-system for sustainable growth to occur.

You can grow one flower in a pot, but if you want abundant growth over time,  
you need an eco-system with diverse plants and animals working together.

The farmers listening to Jesus would know this -

they would know the importance of diverse planting and crop rotation -  
it is even outlined in the torah!

**In fact, it takes an eco-system not only for plant growth, but for any miraculous growth.**

It takes an eco-system of grace, grounded in God, for miraculous growth.

This morning we have two stories of miraculous growth.

1. Rebekah and Isaac pray for the miracle of birth
2. Seeds are thrown by a careless sower and still somehow manage to grow abundantly

In fact, the seeds grow far more than expected.

Farmers at the time would expect fertile soil to produce a 4-5 fold return.

So when Jesus says the seeds produce a 30/60/100 fold -

well, that is almost as crazy as 300 people showing up on a Sunday morning.

It is almost as unbelievable as Jim Crow being dismantled or the slave trade coming to a halt.

It is almost as unbelievable as an estranged family member being welcomed home.

It is almost as unbelievable as a bunch of kids giving up a week of their summer vacation to sweat and work for others.

Unbelievable as it is, Jesus tells his disciples,

"But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one...who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

**That miraculous growth came from being a part of an eco-system of God's grace.**

Rosa Parks knew what it meant to be a part of an eco-system.

When Rosa Parks stayed seated on a Montgomery bus,  
she wasn't alone.

Because after she was arrested, she called the leaders of her community.  
Because she knew they had been looking for just the right person to file a court case  
And so the leaders rallied the community into a bus boycott on the day she was to go to court.  
And students printed off flyers announcing the boycott.  
And preachers got up that Sunday and urged their congregations to stay off the buses.  
People organized carpools to get to work.  
Taxi drivers charged black riders the same amount as a bus fare.  
And when people had been walking instead of riding for months,  
black churches around the nation collected new shoes to send to Montgomery residents.  
Lawyers came to Rosa's aid and they formulated a court case that eventually set the foundation  
for the dismantling of Jim Crow laws.  
Rosa Parks was not alone.  
The Montgomery Bus Boycott took an eco-system to achieve that first step on the road  
towards equality (a road we are still on).

**Miraculous Growth happens in eco-systems of grace,  
every person sharing their gifts.**

I spent a year as a pastoral resident in a new church start in Philadelphia,  
called Broad Street Ministry  
This church was only 8 years old, but served hundreds of people:  
spiritually and physically.  
Every week there were 4 meals, each serving 200 - 300 food insecure people.  
There was a chef, a volunteer coordinator, administrative staff, and social service staff who all  
worked together to bring physical, spiritual, and social support to the community.

But the eco-system didn't stop with the paid staff.  
Suburban churches provided funding and supplies.  
Whole Foods and the Philadelphia Food Bank provided food.  
People and hotels donated clothing for the clothing closet and toiletries for the personal care  
supplies  
Other organizations would come and lend services -  
legal services, medical services, housing services.  
So the miraculous growth of this new church start had a lot more to do with the many partners  
working together in an eco-system than with any one part.

**Miraculous Growth happens in eco-systems of grace,  
each organization and congregation participating in the building of God's  
Kingdom.**

Every eco-system needs a ground floor - a basis from which to grow.  
oceans need ocean floors,  
forests need forest floors,  
deserts need the sand.  
If any of these ground floors disappeared, the whole eco-system would collapse.

Our story from Genesis reveals the ground floor for miraculous growth.  
As with many of the lessons in the Hebrew Scriptures,  
the lesson begins with the patriarch and matriarch of the faith praying.

Indeed, our story this morning began with Isaac and Rebekah praying.  
It is through prayer to God that growth begins and the impossible is achieved.  
Not always in the way we want or expect and certainly not on our time table;  
I am sure Rebekah would have preferred to give birth when all her friends were also giving birth.  
But when a miracle does happen,  
we know something more than human merit is at play.

At Broad Street Ministry there were days when the food delivery did not come and somehow Jesus worked out a fish and loaves miracle.  
And there were times when people - guests, staff, and volunteers alike - would get on edge and a heavy dose of grace was needed.

During the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the pastors had to routinely conduct revival prayer services to keep the spirits up.

### **Miraculous Growth doesn't happen without God at the ground floor.**

In fact, our relationship with God is the beginning and the foundation for our growth -  
growth as individuals, growth as a community, growth as a congregation

Not only do we come together as a diverse eco-system, each with our own gifts,  
but we also ground ourselves in prayer with the One who grounds our growth.

So, this morning I invite you to begin that prayer.

During the offering you will have the opportunity to share with God the miraculous growth you are hoping for.

Maybe there is a part of your life that needs some miraculous growth.

Maybe there is an area in our world that needs some miraculous growth.

In your bulletin there is a slip of paper with the question "What miracle are you hoping for?"  
I invite you to offer up a hope for miraculous growth -  
it can be

In your personal life, or in your spiritual life, or in the life of this congregation, or  
in the life of this city, or in the life of our nation

You will have time at the offering to write down a miracle you are hoping for.

I will pray over these hopes,  
that they may find fertile soil.

My hope is that we plant the seeds of God's love in fertile soil in this community,  
and that we nurture those seeds in a congregation as a thriving eco-system -  
an eco-system with many members playing varied roles,  
an eco-system grounded in God's grace. Amen.