

Pastor Courtney Steitz
Sermon 7/12/2020

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

Some of you may have heard of Maya Moore, but for those of you who haven't heard of her, Maya Moore is one of the most impressive women's basketball players of all time. She was a standout at UCONN winning multiple NCAA championships. From her rookie season she was one of the best players in the WNBA, leading her team to multiple league titles. She has won gold medals at the Olympics. She is a phenomenal basketball player. And at what some would consider the peak of her career, early in 2019 Maya Moore announced that she was going to be taking the season off of basketball. She made a similar announcement at the start of 2020. This would be like Steph Curry or LeBron James or Michael Jordan announcing in the middle of their careers that they are going to take a season or two off. But why was Maya Moore giving up so much? She shared that she wanted to spend time focusing on criminal justice reform, and specifically working for the freedom of Jonathon Irons who she believed had been wrongly convicted. All of the time she spent time praying, organizing, and working would not have been possible while playing in the WNBA, so she gave it up.

Maya Moore made a pretty amazing decision. She gave up two years of playing at what many consider to be the peak of her career. Many came out in support of her decision; wishing her well during her hiatus from basketball. But there were also fans who felt like she was making a mistake. She was giving up too much and letting her team down in the process.

People's initial reaction to Maya Moore's decision, may be somewhat similar to Jesus' first hearers when they heard the parable of the Sower. After all, seed would have been valuable. No self-respecting farmer then or now, would sow seed where they knew it wouldn't yield anything. A wise and discerning farmer would only plant seed in places where they already knew there was good soil. But that isn't what the sower does. The sower is throwing seed all over the place. On the path, on the rocky ground, where he knows birds will get it, but the sower sows the seed there anyway.

Often when we hear this parable, we try to make it about us. We try to figure out what it means to be good soil, or how we can make ourselves better more productive soil. We know we don't want to be like the bad soil. We can probably even think of a few examples of people that we would like to label as rocky soil. And as we think and examine and label, I wonder if sometime we lose sight of the role of God in this parable.

If God is the sower, throwing the seeds of the kingdom, then God seems to be pretty indiscriminate of where the seed lands. If we take this parable seriously, it seems like God cares more about spreading the seeds of the kingdom, than where each seed falls. God extends the invitation to the kingdom life to all sorts of people. Jesus could have said that the sower will only sow seeds on good soil, so make sure your life is in tip-top shape. Be the best, do better, make sure you're good soil when the Sower shows up. But Jesus actually says the opposite. Jesus says that the Sower will throw seed on all kinds of soil. And honestly, this is Good News for us.

Making ourselves into good soil before we receive the seed, before we receive the Kingdom, that is a lot of work. Honestly, that is more work than we are capable of doing. We need God to turn us into good soil. We cannot make ourselves into good soil on our own. Maybe it is even the seed itself that does the transforming. It is God who gives us the ears to hear Jesus' message. It is God who transforms us into good soil through the work of the Holy Spirit. And so we give thanks to God that God continues to be at work in us. There are times that we are more like the rocky soil or more like the path, but God continues to throw seed. God continues to be at work in our hearts and continues to open our ears that we might receive the Kingdom of God. God is running around throwing seed every-which-way even on those who don't deserve it.

And by the grace of the Holy Spirit, sometimes this seed takes root. And when kingdom seed takes root, look out. As God's kingdom grows in us, we might see more signs of the Kingdom popping up all around us as we pray for our family and neighbors, as we support ministries with our time and our money, and as we seek to serve those around us. The Kingdom grows and spreads and more seeds are scattered. Some may not take root, but we may be surprised where we find good soil.

God has a habit of showing up in expected ways and unexpected people. Who would have thought that WNBA star would become a Christian voice for prison and criminal justice reform, and yet, Maya Moore has done just that. Just last week Jonathon Irons was exonerated and released from prison. What on the surface may have looked like a foolish sacrifice ended up being rich soil. The kingdom seed that took root in Maya Moore propelled her to sacrifice her own basketball career to seek the freedom of another. Now that Jonathon Irons is released from prison, who knows what kind of amazing Kingdom of God seed he might sow in his community and our world.

And so today, I think the invitation for all of us is not to worry about what kind of soil we are. Let's avoid getting caught up in labeling the soil and people. Instead let's focus on God and God's abundant graciousness and generosity. Just like the Sower, God moves through the world scattering grace, love, and mercy in all directions. May God open our eyes to the surprising places the Kingdom is taking root, and may God give us the courage to join in.