

Ok, so we're going to do something a little different for a hot second this morning, because I miss you all, and I miss being able to go back and forth with you sometimes during sermons, so we're going to try it with one simple question this morning, and whomever gets the answer in first gets, I don't know, a gold star or I'll buy you a socially distanced lunch, we'll figure it out! Anyway, so this is a very Disney specific question, but roll with me here. If you've seen Finding Nemo get your thumbs ready to type in your answer, because here's your question. In Finding Nemo, what is Dory's catchphrase?

See? It hopefully wasn't too hard of a question, but yes, "just keep swimming." Little Dory and her lack of a short term memory brain have this mantra, this saying that she uses in order to keep herself positive, to keep herself moving in the right direction. When the world, or the ocean I guess, feels a bit too hard or stressful, when she doesn't know which way to turn, what does she do? She just keeps swimming. She doesn't remain still, she doesn't sit idly by, she just keeps moving, no matter what. She attempts, ardently, to get Nemo's dad, Marlin, an uptight, super stressed out, mind racing a million waves a minute clownfish, to adapt this mentality. She's like, dude, you are waaaaay too stressed, you gotta chill. When the ocean throws you some chaos, the only thing you can do is just keep swimming,

eventually you'll get where you're going, or where you were supposed to be, but you can't spend your time swimming in circles over and over, fretting about what comes next, you just have to keep swimming. You keep swimming and you see where the ocean takes you, and eventually things will work themselves out. Don't quit, don't give up, don't get too down on yourself, just keep swimming.

I feel like if there were a subtitle to this week's parable, it would be a bit of a takeoff of Dory's mantra. The Parable of the Sower: God just keeps sowing. But that's getting a little ahead of the game here, so let's take a look at what's happening in this gospel. Jesus has had himself *a day*. Prior to our gospel, Jesus has just had a bit of a knock down drag out with his family, right out in the open for everyone to see. It was like having your worst Thanksgiving dinner in public for the world to gawk at, and so he just wants a little time to himself. He's like I need a breather so I'll go down to the beach, recenter myself, and then get back to it, but of course, Jesus never gets an hour off. The crowds follow him to the shores, clamoring for more teaching, for him to guide them and direct them towards the kingdom he's been proclaiming, so he hops in a boat, and he looks at this massive crowd of people, people who had grown up amongst agriculture and farming, people who knew the ins and outs of planting and growing, people many of

whom probably were taking a break from their own fields to hear Jesus, and he tells them just the absolutely most absurd parable they could ever have imagined hearing.

This group of people, people who know the earth, who know what it takes to cultivate growth, who know the amount of effort it takes to bring out a decent sized harvest would have heard this parable and been like, Jesus, you have lost it, because this just isn't how you farm! This sower that Jesus describes basically just wanders around his fields flinging seeds all over the place willy-nilly, with no plan, no structure, no organization. This is not a planting that is seeking an intentional harvest. It's haphazard and honestly it's just done with a bit of reckless abandon. It's like he stood on the edge of his fields and was like huh, planting takes a lot of work, so let's try this, and just dips his hand into his bag of seeds and then flings them as far as they can go, shrugs his shoulders and is like good enough, let's see what happens. It's not that he doesn't want growth or a harvest, but he's much more interested in just seeing how it plays out rather than manipulating it to happen in one particular way.

But of course, our instinct when we hear this parable, particularly because for once Jesus takes intentional time to explain it, is to focus on the seeds, to examine each description and figure out just where we fit, where

we have fallen after we've been sown. And the thing is, I would almost guarantee that all of us can find ourselves in this parable. There are some of us who hear this and feel like we are right there on the path, scattered beneath the feet of our sower, left to be trampled and snatched up by whatever comes along and claims us. Feeling like we want so ardently to cling to God's Word, to God's promise of love but it gets twisted and tangled in our hearts and we can't find our way out. There are some of us who are going to hear this and be like well here I am bumped and bruised in the rocky soil, where we can't quite get our roots to dig down deep enough to hold us in place and let us thrive and grow. Feeling like we want so ardently to be the disciples God has called us to be, but when confronted with the difficulty of the world, with the task at hand, we falter. There are some of us when we hear this parable we look around and feel the thorns tightening and choking us and we don't really have a chance. Feeling like the call, the cares of the world are too distracting and too all-encompassing to allow us to be anything other than perpetually distracted. And there are some of us that might here this parable with a sigh of relief, like here I am amongst my good soil, solidly growing and thriving and producing in abundance, who hear that God loves you and calls you and it fills you with a sense of relief and excitement. We're all some kind of seed this morning.

But here's the thing...I think if we spend too much time focusing on where we're planted right this second, we lose a little bit of the point of this parable. And I know, if you're in good soil right now, you're probably like but hey! I'm in good soil, I like where I am, let's focus on that! Yet, if you aren't in good soil, focusing on where we're planted right now can be disheartening, exhausting, and downright worrisome. Because we get in our minds that if this is where we're planted now, this is where we shall always be planted, forever and ever, amen. We think that this is our permanent place of where we must try and grow, and listening to Jesus' explanation of how well those seeds grow? It can be like well dang...I don't have a shot.

And that's why I think the heart of this parable actually comes back to the sower and his Dory-esque mantra to just keep sowing. God keeps sowing seeds in this world with reckless abandon. God sows indiscriminately, irrationally, wildly, and perpetually. Which means that where you are now might not be where you are tomorrow or next week or next year or ten years from now. God never stops sowing. God just keeps trying and trying and trying to get us to a place of growing and thriving nestled deep in that good soil, with our hearts full of hope and our souls settled and geared towards discipleship. God doesn't just fling out one handful of seeds, shrug God's shoulders, and be like, well, where those

seeds fall are where they will be forever. God flings it out and says, I'll be back tomorrow and we'll keep trying.

So if you find yourself this morning feeling downtrodden on the path, looking up and worrying that something is going to snatch you away, like you just can't get a grip on your faith and what you're feeling, that's ok. God will just keep sowing. If you find yourself looking around and going there are just so many rocks here, like you can't let yourself nestle in and find a source of hope for deep growth, that's ok. God will just keep sowing. If you find yourself scrambling and twisting desperately trying to avoid the thorns, like your faith can't even stay in your vision of focus because there are just so many other cares and so many other worries, that's ok. God will just keep sowing. And if you find yourself on good soil, like your roots are watered and you're ready to grow and go out into this kingdom to help it thrive, that's fantastic. Because we have the assurance that there might not be days where it always feels like that, where the good soil doesn't feel so good, so we trust that God will just keep sowing.

And I think sometimes we don't even really know what to do with that kind of love and dedication. We're so used to, in so many ways, being placed where we're placed and maybe just forgotten about or left to go it alone, and yet here comes God and is like, nope, I'm not forgetting you and

I'm not abandoning you and I'm never going to stop trying for you and with you, and our hearts are just like...wow...how can we handle, how can we take in that kind of love? And some days we're not really going to know what to do with it, and we're going to doubt it and wonder if it's real, but other days, our good soil days, we're going to hear that love and it's just going to wash over our hearts like some gigantic ocean wave and we're going to feel it and we're going to trust it, and it's going to help us grow just that little bit more because we know it's real.

Ya know, Dory's biggest problem is that she can't remember things. They just don't stick, except for those three words...just keep swimming. It can be immensely hard to remember and hold all these things—that God loves us, that where we're planted is not always where we'll be, that things can change, that things we thought were dormant can still find places to grow. Wherever we are, sometimes those things, those seeds take a lot to fully sink in and stay, but maybe at the end of the day, in this parable Jesus has given us the perfect gift to carry us through, the perfect reminder that we can hold. Instead of trying to remember every little thing, all the time, every second of the day, maybe we just need to take a step back, no matter what ground we're planted in and remember those three little words...just keep sowing. No matter what, God just keeps sowing. **AMEN!!!**