

Sermon for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost July 12, 2026 jj
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✠ sdg ✠

What can you do about your dirt? Let me explain what I mean by that question... Here we have one of the few parables where Jesus Himself explains exactly what the story means, both for His disciples and for you, who are His people of this day and age. As Matthew informs us, our Lord begins His teaching session by getting into a boat, a very common thing in a fishing village on the Sea of Galilee, then He pulls out away from shore a little bit, and lets the natural reflective properties of the lake's water surface magnify His Words to the crowds who had gathered to hear Him. Just imagine a congregation assembled on the shore of a mountain or hillside lake, and you've got one of nature's ready-made amphitheaters, complete with amplification, and this parable in all of its details is the feature of the program. There's the Sower, who is Jesus, of course. The seed is the Word of God, the hot sun and rocky soil is persecution and shallow growth of the Word, the hungry birds are the devil's efforts to mislead our understanding, the thorns are the choking deceitfulness of riches and the anxieties we face in this world. If you have heard or studied this parable before, you probably have made yourself quite familiar with as much of its meaning as I've mentioned so far.

But then we get to the soil—notice how Jesus' careful explanation of His own parable makes no distinction about what happens in the good soil! Why is it that one patch of otherwise fertile dirt yields thirty fold, and another area brings forth as much as a hundred times as much? His disciples questioned Him about all the other details in the parable; why would they not press Him

also about what this part means? It makes you wonder as you apply this parable to your life as a Christian—what can you do about your dirt? That is, not only are you careful to watch for the big stuff—the persecution, the devil, the worldly cares—so that you take root in fertile soil, but it seems like you should also take note of the fruits that your life bears: be it thirty, sixty or a hundred fold. Wouldn't you want to be as productive as possible? Isn't that what God would want for you?

And that is where frustration can enter in. You measure up the difference with other Christians and you start wondering about your soil. You may not have seen anxiety make total shipwreck of your faith, you may not be embroiled in the fires of persecution, and you may not even be tempted to fall into sin on a regular basis. But even so, even if you don't find yourself planted in rocky soil, you're not plucked up by the bird's beak, and the sun hasn't scorched you, still you find something that's not quite right. You may not get this feeling all of the time, but it's more often than you would like. You ask, why can't I be a bit more diligent in Bible reading and prayer? Why am I complacent about making just a minimum effort at the Christian life? I have my chances to tell a neighbor about the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, but I too often avoid them and walk the other way. I already know that it is very important to hold to God's true and pure Word, but there are days when that true and pure Word doesn't seem to have a hold on me. What's going wrong?

Many Christian denominations claim to have the answer to that frustration. Commit to the Lord! Make Him your number one priority! Be a disciple, and not merely a member! And it sounds like they have a point. The Law that they are using is in fact the Law that tells you your Christian life has fallen short, has lost its luster, and you are squarely to blame. You have potential, so they say, to yield a hundred fold, that is, be totally on fire for the Lord, be constant in prayer, and outdo one another in showing honor, as Paul says in Romans, but instead you bring forth a fraction of your fruits of faith. Churches should be doing more. Pastors should be more energetic about getting the Word out. Children should be paying more attention to the worship service and the sermon. And as far as the Law of God says these accusatory things, it is most certainly justified in doing so. It's all true.

There's one thing missing, though. There is a reason why Jesus does not explain the differences between the yield of thirty, sixty and a hundred fold in the parable of the Sower. The answer lies in the Gospel of forgiveness. With the Gospel, there is no how-to, no formula or recipe for you to follow to get the results you're after. When it comes to forgiveness, there's nothing to do, because it has all been done. The Sower Himself grants the yield. The differences between you and other Christians are His matter, not yours. He spread His costly seed indiscriminately, casting it all over the place. He is superabundant in His grace, freely and willingly paying the high cost of your salvation. He endured the pain of the cross, because it was the eternal punishment that was meant for you because of your sins.

But your sins are remembered no more.
Your frustrations are removed, because you

fix your eyes of faith not on yourself and your performance, as it were, but you fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith. Through the waters of your Baptism, you have already been brought out from death to life. Your Savior has shut the roaring mouths of the Law's accusations. You are not going to be saved through trying harder. Your dirt is not going to improve its yield because of anything you do. Instead, it will be Christ and His Word of forgiveness to you, His Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper that will strengthen you, the buried treasure of Scripture that will fertilize your soil for the yield of the fruits of faith that your heavenly Father has had in mind for you from the beginning of time.

When you think of it, there's nothing for you to do, really, except take yourself out of it all. You are planted as a seedling in your particular area of dirt, remember, so the true work belongs to Jesus working in you. When the Law's accusations come your way, instead of assuming you can meet them and put a bigger effort into your Christian life, I'd suggest that you admit instead that the Law is right, say that you are a sinner, and bring that confession of repentance to the cross, talk to your pastor for personal absolution and counsel from God's Word. Leave the results, that is, the yield, whether it's thirty, sixty, or a hundred fold, as a matter of Christ's concern and not yours. He has your dirt under His control. Now that you are forgiven and purified by His cleansing blood, He will join Himself to you so that it becomes Jesus who tells others about Himself through you. Jesus and His Words will lead you to pray and work for God's kingdom in your particular vocation. As Saint Paul wrote, it is not I but Christ who lives in me. All I need to do is get my sinful self out of the way through

repentance. This is not an excuse for me to sin more and work against the Lord—that's what weeds do, and since Christ is the Sower, He did not plant you as a weed. His Word has taken hold of you, and your Lord will not lose His grip, no matter what happens in your life. With His good seed doing the work, He will produce your crop, and at harvest time, He has promised to gather you to Himself in heaven forever more.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The next few weeks in this portion of the Pentecost season, our Divine Service's Gospel reading will proceed through the rest of the parables that are collected in Matthew, chapter 13. Our Lord Jesus Christ has more of His Word of the kingdom and of the salvation that was meant for you. He is not going to give you mere words of instruction, or demands to serve Him, or a complex of guilt because you have failed Him. He is going to plant the seed of His Word into you, and to make of you the disciple that He has already called you to be. He urges you to get into the boat of the Christian church. In fact, you are right now sitting in what is called the nave of the church building—so you are in the boat with Jesus! And just as the water's surface magnified His voice at one time on the Sea of Galilee, so today let the remembrance of the water of your Baptism magnify the Word you hear, reminding you that Christ came to be your Lord too, the one who has redeemed you by His Blood. With Him working in you through the Holy Spirit, your frustrations are removed, your sins forgiven, your reconciliation complete. The Lord has sowed the seed. He will also bring you and your works to full completion when you behold God's face, shining in all glory and blessing upon you.