**“Another Farmer Story”**

In invite you to open your bibles to the 13th chapter of Matthew’s Gospel. This morning we have an awfully familiar parable told by Jesus about a farmer casting seeds. Now, Jesus tells a lot of agricultural stories and in doing so, he tends to get me in trouble. He never tells any stories about coal mining. You see I grew up in coal mining country and I know something about coal mining and living in that environment. I know extraordinarily little about farming and tend to look like the fool that I am when I begin preaching on farming to farmers.

But here we are again, talking about planting seeds, and farming, and once again, my ignorance will shine forth. However, I a farmer once shared some words of wisdom that I would like to pass on to you. Maybe some of you farmers may agree with these words.

1. Keep *skunks and bankers and lawyers at a distance*. Having had all three in my congregations, I will refrain from commenting any further.

2. *Forgive your enemies. It messes up their heads*.

3. *Do not corner something that you know is meaner than* *you*. Sounds like some Session meetings I have moderated.

4. *Life is simpler when you plow around the stump*. Sounds like good advice. Although, there was a local guy in South Dakota that everyone called “Boom-Boom” who farmers would call on to get rid of stumps and such. The police finally caught up with him. Something about needing a license to play with dynamite.

5. *When you wallow with pigs, expect to get dirty*.

6. *And this last bit of advice: Always drink upstream from the herd*. I have always considered that to be wise.

Jesus told lots of stories about farmers. Today’s text is one of those stories. However, the farmer in this story is not particularly gifted at his profession.

But before we turn to our text, let us turn to the Lord of the text. Let us pray….

As a little lad the closest I came to farming was following my dad around in our little half-acre family garden. In the spring after the it was plowed and tilled, I would follow behind dad as he made the furrow, and then again as he hand dropped each seed into the furrow, covered them up, and then he would work the garden through the summer.

When we moved to the Midwest and we saw thousand-acre farms of corn, or soybeans, or sun flowers, or wheat. Guess what I imagined in my head when it came to planting. I was visiting a farmer one day and I told him how amazed I was at the number of crops he planted and wondered how long it took him to get that much seed in the ground. I didn’t share with him what I was imagining.

He kind of looked at me with a twinkle in his eye and he walked me out to his Boeing 747 Hanger sized barn where he kept his equipment and showed me his tractor with the planter attachment and invited me up into the cab. Their I felt like I had entered the space shuttle with all the computer screens.

This is probably nothing new to many of you millennial farmers, but to this naïve kid, it was mind boggling. Traveling at ten miles an hour or more, on autopilot, he can control from the cab of the tractor at least five rows at a time, the amount of seed, along with fertilizer, and make adjustments on the fly over multiple acres of land. I left there with my head spinning, and still not fully comprehending what I just witnessed.

Then I stand at the end of a row of corn and on any farm, in any place in our country, and with that knowledge, and am amazed at the exactness of the row and symmetry of it all. It is absolutely beautiful.

In our text this morning, the farmer appears to be careless by today’s standards. This farmer does not prepare the soil, no plowing, no fertilizing, no furrowing. This farmer just simply flings the seeds everywhere. Casting the seed to the wind not caring where it lands. He or she is just taking a handful of seed and throwing it out and some of it lands on a well-worn path and other among thorn bushes and on rocky ground, and some luckily enough land on good soil.

At the end of the parable the farmer doesn’t sound too careless after all considering the productive harvest. It is when Jesus interprets the parable for us that things take on a whole new meaning. The farmer becomes either God or a preacher, the seed isn’t a seed after all, but the gospel message. And the soil isn’t even dirt. The soil is the audience, the people. People like you and me. Those who hear the message about Jesus, and the good news about salvation and the kingdom of heaven.

As I listen to what Jesus is saying, and I think about what he says about some people hearing the gospel but choosing to walk away, or they lose their faith easily, and there are others who really catch hold of the faith and sink roots into their faith, and grow deep into it. I see all of that.

But there is also part of me that identifies with each one of those soils.

There are times when I feel like a well-worn path. Like the soil that has been walk on time and time again, beaten down, harden and dry. There are times I feel like rocky ground covered with bare roots sticking out ready to trip anybody that happens by. Sometimes my edges are all covered with thorn bushes and briers, and anything that does show life gets picked at by birds. Anybody the comes near me gets scratched and gnarled.

Do you ever feel that way? Sometimes life just wears us down, always coming at us with some new problem or issue and we never seem to catch a break. Bad news on comes at us from all areas. The old tune from Hee Haw seems to be the theme of the day,

“Gloom, despair and agony on me,

deep dark depression, excessive misery

Like those thorn bushes that Jesus speaks of, it is easy for me to get caught up in all the issues of the day and put my faith and Christian values in a neat little box, place it on a shelf, and concern myself with those social arguments that I care so much about. Society and culture, politics and a myriad of debates that are taking place on social media and on the talk shows and cable news networks and all over the media are ripe for pulling me away from what Christ says is important.

All of these squabbles that are tearing our families and our communities apart and giving us ulcers and causing us to fight against our neighbors and dividing friends and families are nothing but thorn bushes and brier patches on which we are scratching away the faith which should be binding us together.

Meanwhile, I have put the seeds of my faith in a little box on the mantelpiece over the fireplace of my hearth, and my faith grows cold.

I sit in front of the fireplace and I look out the window and I have a choice. I can remain in my cold, hard packed, walked on soiled self. Or I can take my faith off the mantelpiece, and move myself over, off that beaten path and onto that soft rich soil and allow my faith to once again grow deep, and my roots to once again find nourishment in God’s grace and love, and my thirst to be quenched in the waters of my baptism and my soul to be comforted in God abundant mercy.

There I can again begin to love and be loved, cherish and be cherish, find, and enjoy the peace which passes all understanding.

Come, friends, will you join men, in the deep rich soil of God’s kingdom. Amen.