

Now everybody has a story to tell, especially at our age. And some people are really good storytellers. But I think the greatest storyteller of all times is Jesus Christ. When Jesus spoke, people listened. Crowds of people would gather around Him to hear what He had to say. Jesus frequently used parables. As a matter of fact, one third of His teachings as recorded in the four gospels are parables. A parable is a short, simple story designed to communicate a spiritual truth, religious principle or moral lesson. A parable is an illustration that uses objects, situations and things that are common in everyday life. These were stories that were easy to remember and meant to hold the attention of the audience.

This morning let's discuss one of Jesus' parables found in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of Luke. This passage is normally called the Parable of the Sower. This parable is also recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. Now those of you who have a green thumb will be able to relate to this story. Listen to verses 4 through 15 of the eighth chapter of Luke, and let's see what we can learn and apply to our lives this morning from this parable.

Read Luke 8:4-15

Now I grew up in a rural part of South Carolina. We lived in a very small town and had a farm about five miles outside of town. We raised cattle and grew hay, corn and cotton. As in any family, each child had certain responsibilities; my bother Billy was the mechanic who kept the tractor running each time I broke it; I was responsible for planting the garden and working the fields on the farm; and my brother Harry was the troublemaker and still is!

As I said, one of my chores was to plant and tend the family garden behind the house. Now our garden was large, about the size of this building. We grew the typical vegetables such as green beans, butter beans, peas, carrots, squash, corn, tomatoes, and okra, which by the way, I have never been able to grow out here in New Mexico. So, I have a lot experience sowing all kinds of different seeds.

One time our cook, Aunt Minnie, really got upset with me. You see an okra plant is normally only two feet high, but this time the stalks grew to over six feet high. Now Aunt Minnie was vertically challenged, not even five feet tall and she could not reach up to cut the okra. She told me that I had sowed the seeds wrong. She said that according to superstition, if you stand up while planting the seeds, the plant will grow too tall. I don't know if this superstition was true, but while she was short in stature, you didn't mess with Minnie. I once saw her pick up a six-foot long snake and swing it over her head and pop the head off the snake. You can bet that my brothers and I stood there with our mouths wide open, and after that we never argued with her; if she said jump, we said how high!

In this story, the farmer goes out to sow his field. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus is sitting in a boat and sees a farmer on the hillside sowing his field in the customary broadcast method. Many of us have used this approach in sowing grass seeds. As the farmer hand-cast the seed, Jesus saw a great teaching opportunity. As we noted earlier, Jesus often used everyday activities that were familiar to His audience to make a point. Here He used the sowing of the seeds to show the different ways that people would receive His message of salvation.

As the story goes, the farmer sows his field with seed. Unlike modern day farming techniques that plow and disk the ground before sowing, the first-century farmers cast the seed over unplowed ground and then turned the seed into the dirt. The farmer plants the seed a handful at a time by throwing them out over the field. Thus, he does not have complete control over where every seed falls, and thus, the seeds fall in various places with differing soil conditions.

In this parable, Jesus lists four types of soils – four different ways that people respond to the Good News. There are many different ways for accepting the Word of God, and thus, the condition of the heart at the time of planting largely determines the harvest. First, Jesus noted that as the farmer sowed the seed, some of them fell on the pathways that served as common access to the adjoining fields. Because these were in constant use by passers-by, the ground became as hard as pavement. It was no wonder that the seeds were unable to germinate and take root; they simply laid there on the surface and became food for the birds. So it was with some of those who heard the words of Jesus. There were those whose minds were so hardened that not even the Holy Spirit could have softened their hearts enough for the words to penetrate.

So, what hardens a person's heart to God's Word? Prejudice and biases can harden the heart. In addition, pride and tradition can create an unteachable spirit. Also there may be fear of a new truth or teaching that may threaten our comfort zones. Thus, we simply refuse to listen to anything that might cause us to change our lifestyle; in other words, we have closed minds. Unfortunately, many people also deceive themselves into believing that they do not need God or His Son Jesus Christ.

A local preacher and a visiting evangelist went to talk with a man whose wife and daughter were active members of the church. The man stood at the door, refused to invite them in and said: "Preacher, I appreciate you coming by, but frankly I'm not interested." The two ministers got no farther than the porch. As far as they knew, he never changed. Ten years later the family called upon the minister to conduct the man's funeral. Unfortunately, the seed never took root in his heart.

Jesus also observed that some of the farmer's seeds fell on rocky ground. Now our first image of this is a field filled with rocks, but that probably is not the case. Rather, it probably refers to

soil that was shallow, with the bedrock hidden just a few inches below the surface. Thus, the seed would fall here, quickly germinate, grow, but would soon die because the soil was not deep enough for the roots to take hold. Jesus saw this as similar to the shallow minds that refused to give His Words the thought that they deserve.

These are those folks we see today who are always excited about something new. They go from one fad to another, from one activity to another, from one church to another, and from one spiritual idea to another. However, their enthusiasm fades rather quickly because there is no depth to their understanding or commitment. Oh, they may attend church on Sunday morning, but they make no attempt to dig deeper into God's Word, to join a Bible study, or have a daily quiet time; in other words, to till their soil.

Emotion seems to be the driving force in their lives. But no one can exist on emotion alone or a spur of the moment decision. If this experience is to be a lasting one, we must give it serious thought and dig into the Word of God. I have been told that only a small percentage of those who make decisions for Jesus Christ during revival crusades ever follow through with their emotional commitment. At that moment the fire burns brightly, but soon the enthusiasm fades and the remaining embers die out.

Now some seeds fell among weeds and when they germinated and began to grow, the weeds won the battle. Picture a field, or part of it, where there once were thorns or goat-heads. The farmer had cut them down, but had not dug up the roots and seed. He planted a crop and the two grew together. The weeds simply choked the life out of the good plants. I think in some ways this must have been the most disappointing result for Jesus. He had seen this far too often. There were those who initially heard His word, understood it, and even began to follow Him, but soon got so involved with other things that they just didn't have time to continue their discipleship. These are the people who hear the Word and give the appearance that everything is great but in a short period of time are distracted by life's worries, riches, activities, and pleasures, and do not grow in the spirit or their walk with the Lord. They fail to put Jesus first in their lives.

Just think about it, if people got easily distracted back then, how much more are we tempted today to forget about Jesus in this fast paced world that we live in? Life has become so hectic that we have no time for prayers, for attendance at worship services, for Bible studies, for family or for Jesus. It is so easy to pack our life so full of personal desires, travel and activities that there is no room for Jesus.

Have you seen the advertisement for the LITE (L-I-T-E) Church? It offers 24 percent fewer commitments, 7.5 percent tithe, ten-minute sermons, forty-five minute worship services, no evangelism and outreach programs, and only eight commandments – your choice. Across the

bottom of the ad is the church's slogan: "We're everything you always wanted in a church – and less."

Then some of the seeds fell on fertile soil and took root and grew; nothing could stop it from producing an excessive crop; the exact opposite of the seeds that fell on the bad soils. As any gardener knows, it all depends on the condition of the soil. And for spiritual growth, it all depends on your relationship with Jesus Christ. When Jesus comes into your heart and takes root, something happens; your life is changed forever.

Now this parable has at least two applications for us this morning. The first applies directly to our personal lives. The question for each of us this morning is: "How is your soil?" Which of these four types of soil represent your life and your personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Is your heart as hard as the parking lot outside? Or is your relationship with Jesus so shallow that it has not taken root yet; it is only surface deep? Is Jesus the number one priority in your life or do you let other things such as work, pleasures, and other interests get in the way of a meaningful relationship with your Lord and Savior? Are you working to improve the condition of your soil? Are you involved in a weekly Bible study or a service project? I hope and pray that the last type of soil represents your walk with the Lord; that you are growing each and every day; that the roots of Christ's love and grace go deep into your heart; and that you are producing fruit for the Lord.

The second application applies to our role as the farmer in this parable, the sower of God's seeds of love, grace, mercy and salvation. Now you might not have grown up on a farm or ever planted anything; you may not have a green thumb, but when you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, believe it or not, you became a sower of the Good News. We are each called to sow seeds of faith and let them fall where they may. Jesus gave us this parable not only to describe how different people will react to the gospel, but also as an example for us to follow.

In the Great Commission, Jesus tells us to go and make disciples of all people. We do this by following the example of the farmer. The farmer threw the seeds at random, knowing that some would grow and produce a good crop, and some would not; that some would fall on the beaten path, the rocky ground, and among thorns. It should be noted that the farmer sowed the same seed on all four types of soil with the same effort, same hope and same generosity.

The farmer does not evaluate the soil's quality or potential; he is not judgmental or biased. There is no soil left unsown and no ground declared undeserving of his seeds. Our task is not to worry about where the seeds will fall, but to sow at every opportunity we have; we are not responsible for the growth, God is! We just need to focus on our call to sow the seeds of faith; because you never know when or where they will take root. It is not about the quality of the soil, but the extent of God's love for all.

We do this in several ways. First, by how we live our daily lives. Can the people around us see the love of Jesus Christ in our words and actions? By living each day the best we can, we reflect Christ's love to those around us. And I guarantee you that this will open up opportunities for you to share what Jesus means to you. Saint Francis of Assisi said "Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary use words." When Jesus said make disciples, He meant for us to become witnesses for Him; to tell others how we came to know Him and what He means to our lives.

At a missionary meeting some young people were discussing the passage from Matthew 5:13 which states: "You are the salt of the earth." One suggestion after another was made as to the meaning of "salt" in this verse. "Salt imparts a desirable flavor," said one person. "Salt preserves from decay," said another. Then one girl brought a sudden hush to the room when she said: "Salt creates thirst." Her statement got everybody thinking: "Have I ever made anyone thirsty for the Lord Jesus Christ?" Have you?

While Jesus told this parable centuries ago, it still applies to you and me this morning. The critical questions for each one of us are: what's the condition of our soil? Are we hardened, rocky, weedy or fertile? Are we trying to improve the condition of our soil? Are we willing to accept our role as the sower of seeds of faith for Jesus? The school year has started and people are getting back to a somewhat normal routine. In addition, many of our friends and neighbors are looking for some meaning in their lives and a place to belong. Look for those friends and neighbors who are currently not active in any church, tell them about High Desert and invite them to join us. As I challenged you in the July newsletter, invite at least two people to church. Are you ready to get your hands dirty for the Lord? Are you willing to make someone thirsty for the Lord? It's fall planting time! Let's get to work. Amen