

Sermon: "Parable of the Sower"

Scripture: Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23

Prayer of Illumination: Almighty God, in you are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Open our eyes that we may see the wonders of your word; and give us grace that we may clearly understand and freely choose the way of your wisdom; through Christ our Lord. AMEN.

*1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. 2 Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. 3 And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. 6 But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. 7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 8 Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 Let anyone with ears listen!'*

*18 'Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. 20 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. 22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. 23 But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.'*

This passage is often called the Parable of the Sower, sometimes the Parable of the Soils. Maybe it should be called the Hundredfold Harvest. Even if the harvest were only thirtyfold, this story would end with a miracle. Sevenfold meant a good year for a farmer, and tenfold meant true abundance. Thirtyfold would feed a village for a year and a hundredfold would let the farmer retire to a villa by the Sea of Galilee. Bushels of abundance are where this parable leads. To be sure, Jesus starts with a good dose of realism. Everyone in the crowd nods his or her head as Jesus describes the trials of traditional first-century farming. Unlike modern American farmer, who carefully prepares the soil with just the right PH balance and then injects the seed into the ground, farmers in Jesus' time cast the seed and then plowed the land.

With this scattershot approach, it is no surprise that some seed falls on hard soil, other seeds on ground too rocky for good roots, and still other seeds among thorns and weeds. Those are the facts of life, and everyone knows it, including Jesus.

Both Jesus and those who follow him also know such facts apply not only to farming, but also to his own ministry at the time. The seed of his teaching has fallen on rock-laden, thorn-strewn ground.

My mother and grandmother would say to me, "Are you listening to me son? Pay attention while I'm talking to you".

Jesus is saying this same thing in his parable of the sower, "Whoever has ears open them". We must listen to learn anything in depth. This is not a parable about sowing- it's a parable about hearing. The Parable of the sower is in three of the Gospels. Matthew 13:9 says, "Whoever has ears, should listen well", Mark 4:3 says "Listen", Luke 8:18 says, "Pay attention to how you listen".

I like baked beans and ground meat very much, and I could eat it with just those two ingredients. But if you add ketchup or bar-b-que sauce, a few spices, onions, bell peppers, bacon bits, and shredded cheese, you will tend to enjoy it more, and eat it more often. The more added to the basic, the better it is to consume.

Again, Jesus is saying something similar, the more you understand and learn about Him, His life, and the “Word of God”, the more you will enjoy it, the more you add to the basic, the more you will consume, or listen, to what it says. Have you ever said; “Let me plant this thought in your mind”. We are expressing the same idea of this in the parable of the sower.

Why use a parable? Matthew 13:13; 34-35 states; “The reason I speak to them in parables is that seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.”

“Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundations of the world.” Jesus taught in parables, using familiar images, ordinary experiences, experiences seen in everyday living, so that the people listening could understand.

The “Farmer” or sower in this parable is “THE FARMER” Jesus Christ. The seeds the farmer is sowing, that needs Good Soil to germinate and grow to yield much grain or fruit, at 30, 60, or even 100-fold, is the “Word of God”. How much we listen, pay attention, learn will determine which type of soil we are. We all wonder which type of soil we best associate with.

The Path: the birds eat up the seed; Those that hear but don’t understand, so Satan plucks them up before they have a chance. Satan is quick to eliminate what they heard. The parent whose words of guidance and compassion fall on their teenagers’ deaf ears knows hard-packed ground. An example of this is from Luke 17:12-19; the ten lepers; the ten lepers approach Jesus and ask Him “Have mercy on us”, Jesus told them to show themselves to the priest and they were made clean. One of the lepers returned and gave thanks, the other nine never returned, Satan plucked them up.

The Rocky Soil: They have developed “NO” roots, so the sun scorches the seedlings. They have received the word with enthusiasm, but it only takes one trial to shake their faith. The word is read and heard but is not understood. They do not understand all of its demands and promises. The businessman who produces a quality product and pays his employees a living wage, only to see his clients go where things are cheaper, is well acquainted with shallow roots. An example of this is from Matthew 8:19-22; a disciple, said “Teacher I will follow you wherever you go”, but “Lord first let me bury my father”. And Jesus replied, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” I have seen this far too often, a person jumps into church with both feet, and then the first sign of trouble and they lose their religion.

The Bramble: The cares of the world and wealth choke out the word. Life gets in the way; Sunday is my only day off and I want to relax with my family; or I work Sundays so I can’t get involved with church. Wealth, Status, they can’t face the pressure, laughter of their co-workers, a slow exclusion from social groups. Some of us have that empty-barrel faith. Walking around expecting things to run out. Expecting that there isn’t enough air, enough water. Expecting that someone is going to do wrong. An example of this is from Matthew 19:16-22; A young rich man asks, “What must I do to receive eternal life”, Jesus responded “Keep the commandments”; “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal or bear false witness, honor your father and your mother, love your neighbor as yourself. The rich man said, “I have kept all of these” so Jesus said, “Sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor”, the young man went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Good soil: This is what yields the grain, fruit, they hear the word and understands it. They understand and they tell others, who tell others, etc. But even Good soil needs sunshine and fertilizer. If they don’t keep listening, understanding, their soil will wear down, deplete, become less useful, maybe 30-fold instead of 60 or 100-fold.

People can listen, but never hear, people can follow, yet never believe. They need to open their ears and hear what is said, and not just listen. Do any of you have spouses that listen, but don’t hear what you are saying to them? (Raise your hand). AMEN.

They need to be willing to hear, prepare their minds and hearts and to believe and repent. They are able to understand the message that brought forth fruit in their faith and lives.

For the SEED, the message of the Kingdom of God, to germinate and flourish, a person must prepare for the hearing and understanding. Till the soil of our minds. Those that are resistant, stubborn, or rebellious in their heart and mind cannot, and will not, receive the Word. The Kingdom comes when the soil and the seed get together, the marriage of seed and soil. Then it begins to germinate, sprout, and produce.

The “Sower” is the same, the seed is the same, the different results depend on the soil.

The point of this parable shows us the contrast in the quantity of the grain lost, 3/4 of the seed is lost, and the final abundance, the 30, 60, or 100-fold of the harvest the last 1/4 of the seed can give.

First century Palestine is a hard time and place to be a Christian. Due to both poverty and persecution, massive numbers of people are migrating out of the region. Within the church itself there are dissenters and false prophets. With this parable, Jesus reminds his followers that rejection of Jesus’ message does not mean the message is wrong or their efforts are folly. It is simply a fact of life, whether in farming or in faith.

Like Jesus, preachers cast the gospel as broadly as the sower in the parable does, with no guarantee where it will land. On Sunday mornings, we look out on our congregations of people who are gathered here for all kinds of reasons. There is the newcomer who is “Church Shopping” or “Trying Out” Christianity. There is the person in crisis who will vanish when things get better. There is the family that comes “For the kids” but quits once the kid’s soccer season starts.

Standing in front of them all, is the preacher, who has poured his heart and soul into the sermon, in hope it will take root, but knows his odds are not any better than the sower’s. In my own ministry I am often tempted to spend my resources – time, energy, hope – trying to coax, cajole, and beg for growth from inhospitable places and people. I can also spend much time despairing when the seed does not take root. The sower does not do that. He accepts the reality that some seed, a goodly portion of it, will fall on bad soil, and he keeps sowing. Jesus keeps spreading the word, no matter how dry, rocky, or weed-infested the ground.

His followers are called to do so the same. But like Jesus, we have yet another calling, also found in this parable. The story does not end with the inhospitable soil. It does not even end with a normal harvest from the good soil. It ends with a miracle, a hundredfold harvest. It is our job to trust – and preach that possibility as well.

In Luke 6:47-49 “I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid a foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house”.

Prayer: Living God, help us so to hear Your holy word that we may truly understand; that in understanding, we may believe, and in believing, we may follow in all faithfulness and obedience, seeking your honor and glory in all that we do; through Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Benediction: Some will never receive the Word, some will begin and fall away, some will take root and grow. The difference will be in how they hear and understand. The parable is a mirror; held up to people’s faces, it shows where people stand. All God’s people said AMEN. GO IN PEACE!