

6th Sunday after Pentecost  
July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020

“Biblical farming in the 21st century” (Matthew 13:23)  
By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today’s text is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 13:23

**“But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”**

Here ends our text.

Looking at the bulletin cover, farming certainly was simpler 2000 years ago. With a bag full of seeds, the sower used his arm accuracy to throw the seeds in the right place and get a yield of crops. Inevitably, there would be some seed that would fall on path, on the rocks or among thorns, while some fell on good soil. I am not at all qualified to talk about how much 21<sup>st</sup> century farming is different from these early methods. Those who farm for a living know all the intricacies of the latest farming equipment. I’m not even sure I would know the right words to describe the machinery.

I think the bag of seeds has now been replaced by what’s called a seed box. And instead of arm motion to cast the seed, there are seed plates that are controlled by vacuums which precisely space the seeds. And there are disks to make furrows and close furrows and “trash wheels” to clear the path of unwanted weeds or debris. It’s all quite amazing how the seed can be placed at the right depth in the soil for optimum germination.

Yes, it’s a bit more complicated than what one presidential candidate said last year that farming consisted of digging a hole, putting in a seed and watering it. Well, his messages didn’t seem to resonate too well with the voters, because he soon dropped out of the race.

But Jesus has a message in today's Gospel for all people that must resonate in the heart to give eternal life in Him. Jesus says, **"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"** And He uses a parable about farming to teach a spiritual lesson about life and give understanding.

The understanding of God's word is to have life and so God calls us to treasure it and hear it daily! With Martin Luther we sing:

*Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word; Curb those who by deceit or sword would wrest the kingdom from Your Son And bring to naught all He has done.*

- I. First, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Biblical farming still calls all people to humble themselves to understand the mystery of salvation

The Old Testament is filled with examples of God's people who turned away from Him and hardened their hearts. Hebrews 4 tells us of the Israelites who didn't enter the promise land because they didn't continue to believe in God who led them out of Egypt.

**"Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. 2 For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it."**

The same word was preached but some did not believe and their faith was choked out by the weeds of worries instead of Godly trust. Did God not part the Red sea for them? Did He not send manna to eat? So, Deuteronomy 8 tells us:

**"So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord."**

The tests that we experience in this life, like the Covid-19 pandemic, God allows the Christian to endure to fear God and trust in His word alone and not come up short of our eternal rest. The same Gospel of salvation in Christ is preached to all. When the Holy Spirit gives faith to believe it, then the person profits from it and he is like the seed planted in good soil.

Verses 10-17 of our Gospel lesson, which were not included, but are important to read on your own, Jesus' disciples ask **"Why do You speak to them in parables?"**

**He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.**

Only God, in His mercy, gives understanding to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven – that is, to know the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. Those who have rejected Jesus, do not know. There are only two groups of people in this world – those who understand and those who do not. Jesus goes on to say, quoting Isaiah 6,

**“Therefore, I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:**

**‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,  
And seeing you will see and not perceive;...**

**Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,  
So that I should heal them.’**

**But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear;”**

God told Isaiah that the majority of the people he would speak to would not believe. Their hearts had turned cold. A tenth, a remnant, would believe God said but the others would be destroyed.

Only God can give understanding to those He wills to give understanding. The remnant during Isaiah’s time, those who believed Jesus’ word, and today’s Christians are blessed for they have eyes that see, ears that hear, and hearts that understand the Gospel.

II. Secondly, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Biblical farming is still about God’s gracious giving of understanding of the Gospel

In the opening hymn we sang in the first verse:

*O Word of God incarnate, O Wisdom from on high, O Truth unchanged, unchanging, O Light of our dark sky: We praise You for the radiance That from the hallowed page, a lantern to our footsteps, Shines on from age to age.*

Jesus, the Word of God incarnate, shines His same truth of forgiveness, life and salvation from age to age. The same Holy Spirit enlightens lost sinners with the Gospel and calls us to be adopted children of God. So, we heard in today's epistle reading.

**For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,**

The spiritual sowing and harvesting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century don't depend on who is sowing the seed, but still depend solely on God's gracious work. So, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:

**"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase."**

And God reminds us in today's Old Testament reading:

**"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.**

The first verse of the hymn which served as the prelude for today reminds us that it is God alone who accomplishes His purpose of salvation when He wills to do so.

*Lord, 'tis not that I did choose Thee; That, I know, could never be; For this heart would still refuse Thee Had Thy grace not chosen me. Thou hast from the sin that stained me Washed and cleansed and set me free and unto this end ordained me, That I ever live to Thee.*

The Holy Spirit gives understanding and faith to produce yields of 100, 60 or 30. When God's word is rejected, there is no understanding and the seed produces zero yield for the plant does not live. Although Jesus gives 4 different scenarios of how the seed falls, there are only two outcomes. The seed either produces a viable fruitful plant or it dies. The difference is receiving understanding or not.

It all comes down to hearing with understanding by the power of the Holy Spirit. Hearing without understanding is like the saying “it goes in one ear and out the other.”

God has graciously given 21<sup>st</sup> century farmers advanced understanding and wisdom to more accurately plant seeds so that less falls on the path and gets eaten by the birds. God has given farmers wisdom to use machinery that plants the seed at the right depth so that it gets enough moisture and has good roots. Yes, the agricultural experts of today have been guided by God’s gracious hand to greater understand the natural science that Jesus explained in simple terms in the parable of the sower. But above all, even with advanced farming methods, the Christian farmer always understands that God receives all thanks and glory for producing the yield.

Yes, it’s an amazing process of how a seed germinates when water is added to it. It’s a God designed process. The inner workings of germination are something that all can admire in the way the Master designer planned it. Simply put, it’s a gift, as God said in the first book of the Bible.

**“See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.**

God’s people who are also the spiritual sowers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century continue to admire how God changes peoples’ hearts through His gracious life-giving word. The mystery of faith is made known and the seed takes root and grows. We can’t understand fully all the mechanisms that take place in germination, much less how the Holy Spirit gives understanding and faith through His word. We can only thank God for the new life we have and the gifts He gives to produce yields of 100, 60 or 30!

Blessed are you who have eyes to see, ears to hear, and mouths to proclaim His word and cast His seed! All glory be to God. Amen!

**“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Galatians 4:7)**