

The 7th Sunday after Pentecost
“The crop producing Word of God”
Matthew 13:23
July 16, 2023
Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 7th Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 13:23

“But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

So far the text...

Have you ever gone to a movie, watched it and at the very end you were left hanging? You're thinking to yourself, did the hero survive as you watch the credits roll. And then you notice that nobody is getting out of their seats yet, so you enjoy the music a little more and then all of a sudden, the movie starts again with a quick scene that sheds a little light on what you were wondering about, and you realize that there is going to be a sequel that will answer all your questions.

Well, that's a movie director's way of hooking you so that you come back and pay to watch the sequel, right? Long before Hollywood was making movies, the Master story teller, Jesus, was using parables to help His people understand the truths of Scripture.

Chapter 13 of Matthew begins with Jesus' first parable, the parable of the Sower. It's so important that it is included in the one-year lectionary series. The one-year series is the historic series of readings that are the same every year. We have been following the three-year series which change every three years. In the one-year series, the parable of the Sower occurs on the pre-Lent Sunday called Sexagesima, that is 60 days before Easter. In the 3-year series, as you know, the Epiphany season is extended right up to the beginning of Lent and there is no three week transition called the “gesimas” into Lent. And the reading is from Luke 8 on Sexagesima Sunday, the parallel Gospel account.

Why do I take the time to tell you this? Because the early church thought it was important to hear the parable of the Sower every year, not just every third year. It is also one of the parables that has an explanation to it.

So, many people heard Jesus' first parable. There were so many people that were gathered around Him that He had to preach from a boat. Now you notice from our Gospel reading that it jumps from the end of the parable in verse 9 to the explanation in verse 18.

In between these verses, the disciples come to Jesus and ask Him an important question. "Why?"

"10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

Listen to Jesus answer.

"11 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. 12 For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."

What's the key word here? "Given". God is the giver. He is the revealer of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. He reveals the central truth of salvation in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives understanding to know what the Bible means.

We began this season of Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit as a flame of fire on the disciples. And the Holy Spirit gave the hearers the understanding to know the wonderful works of God in their own language. They heard God's Word of both Law and Gospel. When they heard the Law, they repented of crucifying Jesus and then received the Gospel, the forgiveness of their sins in the Word, sealed in their baptisms.

Then they continued to gather together as we heard in Acts chapter 2 to hear God's Word in the temple, pray and receive the Lord's Supper in the breaking of bread. And they shared what they had, and their numbers grew. They were bearing fruit

by the power of the Holy Spirit. They were the first Christians of the New Testament church who heard the Word of God and were saved.

There are only two outcomes when the Word of God is heard. Either faith is given by the Holy Spirit or it is rejected by the hearer and the person is lost. Jesus spoke in parables so that those who are given understanding receive even more spiritual abundance. But those who reject the Word of God, it's understanding is closed even more to them. So that the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9 is fulfilled in them.

**“Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;”**

What does today's parable of the Sower mean to you? It means that you have been given a precious gift that many have rejected. You have been given the understanding to know where salvation is found – in Jesus Christ who is the “Way, the Truth and the Life”. The Holy Spirit has graciously revealed this to you and showers His gifts upon you in an even greater understanding of His Word and the gifts of His sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper!

In these humble Sacraments of simple water with the Word and bread and wine with the Word are the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life!

The Holy Spirit rolled out the credits for you that revealed to you the mysteries of God and all the credit goes to God who gave His only Son to die for you, rise for you and will come again for you to take you to be with Him in heaven.

These are the most important gifts in life. And for this reason, Jesus says,
“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

You and I need to hear always and never stop hearing. For the troubles of this life and the persecutions of this life will not stop trying to keep you from having deep roots in God's Word. And the temptations of the devil and your own sinful flesh will not stop trying to choke your faith out. Yes, the devil is the evil bird in the parable that snatches the Word of God that falls on the wayside. The devil snatches it before it can be heard lest as we hear from Luke 8:

“Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.”

That's what is at stake here – salvation itself. And the devil knows that the Word of God alone has the power to make good soil and “**a good and noble heart**” as Jesus says again in Luke 8:15.

Why do I say that God alone makes the good soil and the good and noble heart that keeps the Word of God and bears much fruit?

Because Scripture gives us this understanding in Romans 3. It tells us that by our sinful nature none are noble or good.

**“There is none righteous, no, not one;
11 There is none who understands;
There is none who seeks after God.
12 They have all turned aside;
They have together become unprofitable;
There is none who does good, no, not one.”**

But, stick around for the credits and hear not just the Law, but the Good News of the Gospel which the Holy Spirit alone reveals. For a few verse later in Romans 3 we are given the understanding of how people are made good and noble in God's eyes. Are you ready to hear?

“21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.”

The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus is the key to understanding all the parables. There is nothing innate in sinful man that explains why he is saved and others aren't. It is only by the gift of faith that the righteousness of God is given and much fruit is given.

And we know and understand very well how this happens from Romans 10.

**“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,
Who bring glad tidings of good things!”**

16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” 17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Not all will believe the report of the Good News of salvation in Jesus. In the next weeks, Pastor Richardson will preach on the parable of the wheat and tares. The wheat, the believers, are gathered into the barn of the Kingdom of Heaven, while the tares, the unbelievers -the weeds, are burned in the everlasting fire of hell.

Then you will hear about the dragnet that catches all kinds of fish. The good fish, the believers, through faith in Jesus, are the keepers, and the bad fish are thrown away.

Maybe you’ve heard the “Fisherman’s prayer”.

“God Grant that I may live to fish until my dying day, And when it comes to my last cast, I then most humbly pray; When in the Lord's safe landing net I'm peacefully asleep, That in His mercy I be judged as good enough to keep.”

Judged good enough to keep – by the grace of God alone – the righteousness of God alone given through faith, given by the hearing, knowing and understanding of God’s Word.

He that has ears, let him hear! Hear the Good News of salvation in Jesus alone, receive His body and blood for your salvation often, keep this precious Word of God and sow it in your heart and in the hearts of others that God will bring about an abundance of fruit!

And the sequel? Well, we know that’s coming soon! And by the grace of God, you’re in it! Jesus is coming to take us to heaven! Amen!

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