

July 16, 2023
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (Isaiah 55:10-13)

GOD’S SEED ALWAYS ACCOMPLISHES ITS PURPOSE.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Webster’s Dictionary defines the word *parable* as: “***a short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle.***” But perhaps a better definition of a biblical parable is: “***an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.***” (Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon) Like many of Jesus’ parables, the Parable of the Sower seems preposterous to human wisdom. No farmer in his right mind is going to waste costly resources casting seed far and wide without regard to where it is being sown. Even in the days of old when farmers would broadcast the seed across the ground one hand-full at a time, they would still first prepare the soil and then only sow where the seed would abundantly grow.

But our Lord God is no ordinary farmer and His seed is no ordinary seed. And that is where the earthly story takes on its heavenly meaning. God uses what appears foolish to the world to shame the wise. He uses what appears weak in the world to shame the strong. (cf: 1 Corinthians 1:27) In today’s parable, the Sower is Christ, and the seed is His holy Word. His seed is active, creative, and life-giving. Unlike the American farmer and you and me planting a garden in the back yard, Jesus is not particular about where He sows. He sows indiscriminately and haphazardly, on hardened paths, on rocky ground, and even among the thorns.

Sowing seed for a harvest is exhausting work. But the parable illustrates the gracious and loving character of our Lord who labors in the fields and never requires rest. Greater than that, Jesus left the glory of heaven to call all who labor in this sinful world to come unto Him and find rest in Him. (cf: Matthew 11:28) He does not only plant His Word among those who appear to have potential or already have their lives in order. To seek and save the lost, He hung out with the lowest of the downtrodden, sowing the seed of His forgiveness and salvation far and wide, calling sinners to repentance and faith. (cf: Matthew 9:13; Luke 19:10) He desires that all people be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth of His Word. (cf: 1 Timothy 2:4) To that end, He travels throughout the cities and villages, teaching in the synagogues and proclaiming the Good News that the reign of God in Christ had entered creation to reclaim and restore it by winning victory over the power of sin, death, and the devil.

This is an important point for the Church as the people of God go out and evangelize. There is always a big temptation to pick and choose the mission field. Some will target a certain demographic and “*style*” itself to reach that certain class of people, telling them the things that they want to hear. They might call themselves a family church, a hipster church, or an inclusive

church, or whatever. This is dangerous because it has Christians intentionally directing God's Word to some, and not others. It is changing the truth of the Word to reach people rather than proclaiming the truth so that people might be changed by God's Word. Of course, there is nothing wrong with long-range planning, getting better equipped to sow the seed of God's Word, while seeking out unbelievers and the unchurched.

It is true that it is easier to approach those you are comfortable with and tell of the hope you have in Christ. It is easier to approach those whom you believe are free of weeds, thorns, rocks and all the rest. Or target those who have a lot to offer back to the church, especially those with little or no issues... those who are ready to get involved rather than those with baggage, who need compassion, extra patience and tender loving care.

The Sower in the parable *does not* discriminate. Our Lord sows His Word here, there, and everywhere – to all ears – believing and unbelieving – including you and me. For all need to be called to repentance by the full sternness of God's Law. This prepares the soil of the heart to be comforted by the saving Word of the Gospel, giving assurance of God's forgiveness.

The soil onto which the seed is sown in the parable is the human heart – and no heart is safe from the evil one. All hearts are under attack. Since Christ has won victory over sin, death, and the devil, the devil can no longer attack the Lord of the Church. So he attacks those for whom Christ has died, including you and me. The devil does not always wait until the scripture lessons have been read or the sermon preached before he swoops in to devour what has been sown in the heart. Even before you have had a chance to digest God's Word, the evil one attempts to snatch away the Word while you are still hearing it. In others, the devil takes the Good News of salvation before the hearer has a chance to even begin to believe. This is the seed sown along the path.

Jesus describes some seeds falling on rocky ground and after springing up they soon wither and die. This is a picture of some who hear Jesus' preaching and initially believe and follow him, but for some reason, they do not put down roots deeply into Jesus and His truth, and when they experience tribulation and persecution because they are following Jesus, they turn away and no longer live as His disciples.

Jesus describes some seeds falling among the thorns – thorns which grow and eventually choke the life out the seed. These are people in whom the Holy Spirit has created faith, who hear and believe and follow Jesus, but they get distracted and choked off when the pleasures of the flesh and the world seduce them, or when the worries of living in this fallen creation steal away the hope and joy they once had in the Good News of salvation in Christ.

In the parable, most of the seed that is sown never produces fruit. And why this is – is a mystery known only to God. He never forces anyone to believe. He comes in ways that are mysteriously lowly and weak and resistible. And that makes your heart and mine ripe for the devil's picking. Your heart becomes a hardened path when you think you do not need weekly Word and Sacrament. Your heart becomes rocky ground when it demands its own way, not loving your neighbors as yourself. Satan's thorns scratch and prick your flesh, making you hateful, spiteful, and vindictive. His temptations to drag you off into the weeds, hoping you lose your way to hearing and understanding God's Word.

But take heart. Where God's pure seed is sown, it always accomplishes its purpose. Like we heard in our Old Testament lesson, rain and snow fall from the sky, but before they are evaporated back up, they do the Lord's work, watering the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, providing seed for planting and daily bread for the hungry. So it is with God's Word. It does not return to Him empty. It accomplishes and succeeds in the purpose for which it was sent. (cf: Isaiah 55:11) Unfortunately, for those who rebel and harden their hearts toward God, it is possible that God might send forth his Word against those who have already set themselves against Him. This sounds contradictory, but again, this is a mystery hidden within the wisdom of God.

While the Lord calls all to Himself in His Word and to receive His good and satisfying gifts, not everyone who hears His Word will come to faith. Satan is lurking, hoping to snatch the seed away. With two identical seeds planted side by side in fertile soil, many times one grows up to bear fruit while the other does not. So also, two children can grow up hearing the exact same message from God's Word, being taught by the same pastor and the same parents. One will believe and the other will follow the sinful and evil ways of the world. But never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit. The Lord continues to sow His Word everywhere, calling all to listen diligently. His life-giving Word calls all to repentance and to receive His forgiveness that they may produce abundant fruit. This is why Jesus says:

“He who has ears, let him hear.” (Matthew 13:9)

Open your ears to hear God's Law and Gospel proclaimed. Repent of your sins of despising preaching and God Word, your sins of being hateful, spiteful, and vindictive. Your sin of not sowing the seed of God's holy Word as you travel along the pathway of your life. Repent and receive the forgiveness of Jesus. Your Savior's salvation is freely given to those who trust and believe in the Lord Jesus. (cf: Acts 16:31)

God did not sow His seed in you because He thought you were good fertile soil. It is quite the contrary. He sowed it because He loves you and He wished to save you. When He sowed His seed in you, it was sown into the most forsaken soil that could be imagined. It was condemned and dead soil. But God's seed – God's Word – doesn't require fertile soil. Just as His Word spoke the heavens and the earth into existence out of absolutely nothing, His Word creates new soil. God's Word recreates the hard paths, the rocky ground, and the thorn choked patches of your heart into fields of salvation. He restores your heart and mind into fertile fields for His Word and for His Spirit.

By human reason, it appears that Jesus' earthly ministry was unsuccessful. He was met with widespread rejection, animosity, and deadly opposition. Yet, God works all things for His glory and for the good of those who love and trust Him. (cf: Romans 8:28) As His disciple, He calls you to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him, (cf: Matthew 16:24) suffering rejection for the sake of His name as you sow the seed of His Gospel in your vocations and stations in life. Do not be mistaken, thinking that it is you who creates the growth... thinking that it is you who brings others to faith in Christ. The parable teaches that it is God alone who softens and warms stone cold unbelieving hearts. You sow the seed. You water and fertilize the seed. But God alone gives the growth. (cf: 1 Corinthians 3:6) Scripture teaches that you cannot by your own reason or

strength believe in Christ, or come to Him, but it is the Holy Spirit who calls you to faith by the Word of the Gospel.

The Holy seed of God's Word carries the Good News of Jesus, the Word made flesh. He came down from heaven and accomplished the purpose for which He was sent: claiming victory over sin, death, and the devil. Jesus came to carry your crop of sin and condemnation to the cross, where He suffered death in your place, so that by His sacrifice, you might have eternal life.

The Sower in the parable is Christ Jesus and He continues to sow His seed by means of His Word and Sacraments. He sowed His seed in you in Baptism, regenerating you into a new creation, (cf: 2 Corinthians 5:17) reconciling you to the Father. His seed is sown and planted through His Divine Service to you, right here when He continually feeds and strengthens your faith in the hearing of His preached Word. He feeds, nourishes, and strengthens your faith in the eating of His body and drinking of His blood in His Supper. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God's seed:

"... indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty." (Matthew 13:23)

... each according to his ability. (cf: Matthew 25:15) You can have confidence that God's Word is powerful and effective, sustaining you unto life everlasting.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.