

July 16, 2023

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

“Seed and Soil”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

After buying a new home, a man began to put in a new lawn. He prepared the soil, put in a sprinkler system, and then waited for the right day to sow the seed. Then he sowed the seed, rolled and watered the lawn. For the next three weeks he daily watered the lawn and chased away the birds and his cat. Except for a few weeds, nothing came up. Then one Saturday morning he discovered in the garage a sack of grass seed. “What in the world did you plant?” asked his wife. With a sigh he replied, “kitty litter.”

I have to tell you that as soon as I read that illustration I was hit by one thought: Much of the seed that we plant in the lives of other people is kitty litter. Hardly do we ever speak the seed of God’s Word to others or even allow that seed to shape and mold what we do and say. I look around and see social media, and catch the so-called “news” of the day, and then I chase after various forms of entertainment, and I see a ton of kitty litter. And we are so easily caught up in it when the real thing that matters is the truth of who made us and what he has planned. So much kitty litter. Don’t you think it’s about time that we sow the seed of God’s Word for a harvest that will last?

And then there is the expression in our gospel lesson: “He who has ears, let him hear.” Did you happen to notice when you were reading or listening to the gospel lesson that, in verses 18-21, Jesus refers to one who “hears the word” four times. That’s kind of scary since for many people in every day life hearing is a big problem. No, it’s not a matter of getting the best hearing aid on the market. We just fail to listen because we refuse to listen for various reasons. We men are often accused by women of having selective hearing, and we men often accuse women of hearing things we never said. Spiritually speaking, and this is most important thing in our gospel lesson, we can’t hear a thing unless Jesus opens our ears to hear, and then speak of what we have heard. Spiritually speaking, we are all like the man in the gospel of Mark (7:32-35):

And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

Only Jesus can open up ears that cannot hear. Only Jesus can loose our tongues to speak of what he has spoken to us. In the parable of the sower you have four different ones who hear the word. One is in the form of a path, another is rocky soil, still another is soil that is infested with thorns, and finally there the good soil. Lest we empty grace of grace, we need to understand that the good soil is only good because Jesus has caused it to be good. The ones who hear the word as a path, or as rocky soil, or as ground that is infested with thorns, are that way because that is their nature and no fault of Jesus. The concern is hearing God’s Word, and then that Word growing into a plant that bears fruit. We pray for Jesus to put his fingers in our ears to hear, and spit and touch our tongues to speak the seed that has been planted in us. Without his undeserved kindness there will be no plant and harvest.

The truth of the matter is that it is in the power of people to refuse the seed of the gospel. They are like the path that has become hardened to the truth, where the evil one snatches it away. Contrary to the once saved always saved crowd, there are those who hear and believe, but rocky ground is not deep, and the rocks are not removed, and they do not have roots in themselves to survive when tribulation and persecution comes around. And then there are those who are full thorns. The cares of life down here and the deceitfulness of having stuff gets in the way and finally chokes out the plant.

One of the things that almost always occurs to me, whenever I think about the parable of the sower, is how the parable is not only about other people and our witness to them, but it's about us. What I mean to say is that when we think of the parable, we often think about the effect of our witness on other people, short and long term. And it is true to say that, as we witness, we can see the parable unfold before our eyes. But the truth is that while we can say that we are Christians today, there are moments when we see that there is still a hard path in us, or a rocky ground, or the ground that is full of thorns. G. J. Albrecht writes:

By nature we were like that hard ground, totally unreceptive to the gospel and at the mercy of the devil. Sometimes we are like that shallow ground, and we imagine that we don't need to sink our roots deeply into the soil in order to be able to endure whatever might come into our lives. And we surely are all subject to "the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth." As we take the whole parable to heart, let us thank God for having brought us to the knowledge of the truth and for having given us unlimited opportunities for growing in faith and godliness through the power of the gospel of Christ (*Matthew*, pg. 197).

Indeed! We too must be careful that we do not become callous of heart, or shallow in our beliefs, or so overgrown with thorns that we die. Thus, it is vital that we allow the law to plow our ground everyday, and remain in the living water of the means of grace. It is vital that we grow strong to endure and push back the worries of life and the temptation to run after pleasures and treasures.

It is no wonder that in our witness we cry out to the Lord for help, for if we ourselves are not in the faith and versed in the faith, then how can we share the faith with others. But we pray that we do share the precious treasure of the cross and empty tomb with others. There isn't any greater gift in the world that we can give to another person than forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. But the only thing that can really do that is the Seed of God's Word. It reminds me of the words of our Old Testament lesson (Is. 55:10-11):

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

It is the Lord who will accomplish that which he purposes to accomplish by the Word of his mouth. That is the power, and we ask that the Lord would continue, as he has promised, to accompany it and help us to accept what it accomplishes. Sometimes the success of the Word is found in the enormous or small growth of the kingdom, and sometimes that word simply serves as a judgment against those who

persistently reject it. Either way, the Lord is doing his powerful work, and he is doing that powerful work through us whenever we sow the seed. While the next words that I would like to share with you are from 1 Corinthians 3:6-9, and are primarily about pastors serving the church, they are just as applicable to everyone who proclaims the cross and empty tomb in private life according to their vocation. Paul writes:

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

Our Lord has given us the following charge in the book of Jude (20-23), “But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.” May we take those words to heart and pursue them vigorously.

Seed and Soil. Nothing’s going to grow if we keep spreading kitty litter. And as far as the soil is concerned, we leave that to the Lord. But, having become a planting in the Lord ourselves, we should be very much concerned about our own soil, asking the Lord to make us productive in spreading his seed. And though we scatter it everywhere unknowing what it will accomplish, we trust that God will carry out his purpose.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott