

Pentecost 7A (Proper 10)

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

July 16, 2023

Can you accurately number how many times you have heard, read and studied today's gospel. From worship, to Bible class, to Sunday School, to personal devotions, this is one of those accounts that you have heard over and over and over again. And at first glance, we might be tempted to think we get it already because we've heard it all before. And in the end we give thanks that we're not the soil of the path or the rocky soil or the thorny soil but rather the good soil. And we miss the point of Jesus' parable.

Jesus didn't speak this parable in order to explain the why of the question about why some people come to faith and others don't. He's not saying that some people are just more naturally inclined to accept the Word of God when and where it is planted. Jesus is describing for us what happens in the lives and hearts of people when his Word is preached.

In fact, one really neat way to summarize the whole point of this parable is with the 2<sup>nd</sup> petition of the Lord's Prayer. We pray, "Thy kingdom come." Then, we ask that good Lutheran question, "What does this mean?" As we learned it, this is what it means to pray, "Thy kingdom come." "God's kingdom certainly comes by itself even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also come to us." And then we ask, "How does God's kingdom come?" And the answer: "God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven."

As we consider the parable of the sower, let us repent of the times when we have been lazy and indifferent hearers; when we have been superficial hearers; when we have when worldly-minded hearers. Join me in rejoicing that by God's grace in Christ, you are fruitful hearers.

In the parable, Jesus is the Sower who is sowing the seed, which is the Word of God. As the sower sows, some falls along the paths that ran through the fields where the birds came and ravenously ate them up. Some seed fell on rocky soil where there was a thin layer of topsoil covering the rocky bed underneath. Because that soil warmed quickly the seeds sprouted promptly but when the scorching middle eastern sun came out, they were scorched by the heat because they had no deep roots to provide water. Other seed fell on soil that became infested with prickly thorns and eventually the weeds choked out the plants, stifling life from them. Finally, some seed fell on the good soil where it germinated, sprouted up, grew strong and healthy and produced much fruit.

Let's listen to Jesus himself explain the parable: ***"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: <sup>19</sup> When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. <sup>20</sup> The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup> But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. <sup>22</sup> The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. <sup>23</sup> But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."***

As we have heard the parable today, did you realize again or maybe for the first time that we are not just one type of soil? As I noted before, one of the purposes of this sermon was that we repent of the times when we have been lazy and indifferent hearers; when we have been superficial hearers; when we have worldly-minded hearers.

How can we be lazy and indifferent hearers? It can happen when we listen to the Word like our first parents and disbelieve what God says and replace it with what Satan says. It can happen when we ignore and douse the voice of conscience that testifies with the truth of God's Word. It can happen when we view the hearing, reading, memorizing and meditating on the Word with a take it or leave it attitude...or look at it as something that is good for the younger generation or consider something that you will do later in life.

How can we be superficial hearers? Hasn't it ever happened that you have heard or studied a particular promise of God and that message brought you true comfort and peace...only later you despair of the exact promise? This kind of hearing also happens when we only hear the Word irregularly. It happens when you hear the Word regularly but with only half an ear open. It happens when you are reluctant to wrestle with the meaning in order to come to a deeper understanding. It happens when you are willing to soften or even hide your confession of faith when that slight or that sneer or that snide remark is directed at you.

And how can we be worldly-minded hearers? To put it bluntly, we worry. We let the cares of this present time stifle trust in God's promises. Don't be misled or mistaken...worry of any kind chokes off true spiritual life. It happens when we acknowledge that Christ cares for us but refuse to cast all our anxiety on him. We can also be worldly-minded hearers by neglecting to hear in the Scriptures what our greatest problem is and what our only solution is. We can think what we need most from the Bible is some sure-fire path to a more productive, more blessing filled, yes, more God-pleasing life. We can begin to want to hear more about the Christian than about the Christ.

All of these ways of hearing are sin. And we are they. At one point during the day we are the path as we clearly know what God says about sins of the tongue and we neglect it. At the next point we shy away from a confession of the full truth of the Scriptures because someone will ridicule. And then we become so caught up in the trappings of this world, we try to play God with our worry and choke out faith. Repent of those sins. Admit your guilt. Confess that by your sins against Christ and his Word, you deserve the same end as the seed sown on the first three types of soil. Join me in the prayer, "Lord, have mercy."

And then rejoice and give thanks that in Christ and by Christ and by his Holy Spirit, you have received the seed of the Word; that it has taken root and grown and produced fruit. It isn't because you were less of the soil of the path, rocks or thorns than any one else. It isn't because there was any capacity in your heart, no matter how big or how small to accept the sown Word. This is the joy and beauty of this parable. It is all about the Sower and his seed. It is all about Jesus. It is all about Jesus for you.

Think of his life in your place here on earth and what he did for you. He was never a lazy or indifferent hearer of the Word. He was never a superficial hearer of the Word. He was never a worldly-minded hearer of the Word. As he sat on Joseph's lap and heard the account of the Passover read every spring, he was hearing for you. As he entered the synagogue or Temple and heard the Word of the Lord proclaimed, he was hearing for you. This means that in Christ, you are good soil. His obedience to God's command to hear and receive the Word is now yours.

And to think of all the times that you have been lazy and indifferent hearers and superficial hearers and worldly-minded hearers, all of those grievous sins against Christ and his Word have been forgiven because the Father treated his Son like Jesus had committed those hell-worthy acts.

The seed of the Word has been planted in you in baptism. That seed has sprouted and taken root as it has been fed with the real and true body and blood of Christ. And now it produces fruit. Jesus doesn't dictate or prescribe the fruit in real detail. He just says it bears fruit. He guarantees it. Indeed, on this side of heaven the size of the crop varies. Indeed, east of Eden it varies from believer to believer; from day to day and from year to year. Yet it bears fruit.

So what happens when we find ourselves tempted to be the one on whom the seed was sown beside the road or on rocky places or among the thorns? What happens when we again fall into the sins of lazy, indifferent, superficial or worldly-minded hearing? What happens when we examine our lives and see our woeful lack of production of fruit? The answer lies in this parable. Remember what the crowd did at the beginning of the parable? They gathered around Jesus. Literally, they synagogued around Jesus. And where Jesus is, there is his Word proclaimed and sown. And where the Sower is with his perfect life, his innocent death and his glorious resurrection, there is forgiveness, life and salvation. And where there is forgiveness, life and salvation, there is fruit. Where the seed of the Word is, there is power to produce good soil and the fruits that follow. There God's kingdom comes among us. There our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven. Amen.