



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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May 4, 2008

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

"Future Pastor" Paul Micheel

First Lesson: Isaiah 55:10-11

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 65

Second Lesson: Romans 8:18-25

Gospel: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

God's Word Works

We have all seen many wondrous and miraculous things in our lives; whether it be standing next to a mammoth-sized mountain or spending time in the company of loved ones. Perhaps it is a mother who tenderly looks on a newborn child. But what about something like a seed? How could something like a seed be wonderful? In our gospel for today, Jesus shows us how the seed of God's Word works wonders. It works wonders with less than fertile soil and also with fruitful soil.

Before we look at our parable, we need to look at some of the events that went on that day. Jesus had been teaching in a house by the Sea of Galilee. While in the house, he healed a man who was both blind and deaf. Jesus' enemies accused him of doing this by the power of the devil. This brought Jesus into sharp disagreement with the spiritual leaders of Israel. Jesus' enemies weren't the only ones to take an interest in him this day either. His mother and his brothers came to visit him. They had been hearing things, and perhaps they thought Jesus was as crazy as the people said he was.

After these events, Jesus moves from the house to the seashore. The seashore was crowded with many people. So he got into a boat to teach. When he got in the boat, he sat down. This was an important visual signal for the people of his day because teachers in Jesus' day and in the Jewish culture of his day would sit down to teach. When he sat down to teach, he began to teach them in parables.

Why would he teach them in parables? This is such a natural question that the disciples in the verses in between our text for today asked this very question, to which Jesus gives the answer. "This is why I speak to them in parables. Though seeing, they do not see. Though hearing, they do not hear or understand." Jesus taught in parables because those who would understand would do so by faith. And those who would not understand would not understand because they did not have faith.

Jesus begins our parable for today by saying, "A farmer went out to sow his seed." There are several interesting things about this. First of all, who is the farmer and what is the seed that he is sowing? We know from the background that the farmer is none other than Jesus himself. And the seed that he is spreading is the seed of God's Word. Now the manner in which he spreads the seed is not conservative, for the farmer would spread the seed all over the field in hopes that it would reach every portion of the soil and that it would be able to find good soil to bring good fruit.

In the same manner, Jesus wants us to go throughout the world with the seed of his wondrous Word and spread it to all the lands. We have become the farmers of the parable. But what will we see when we go out? Jesus gives us an idea with some of the soils from the parable.

As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path and the birds came and ate it up. The fields of Jesus' day had paths running through them that were rusty and dusty and hard. Our Bulletin for today has a good illustration of the farmer. He would go through this field with a bag at his side. From this he would spread the seed throughout the field. Invariably some of the seed would fall from the bag and land on the hard ground. These are the people who appear to be hardened against God and his wondrous Word. They blatantly reject it because their hearts are hard. The devil comes and he works deliberately and he works without mercy on these people. We see the effects in their lives. They hate anyone and everything that has to do with God. We experience this when they attack us, and we see the trouble that comes into their own lives. Notice too the words "ate it up." When the birds came, they ate up the seed completely. In the same way, the devil comes and snatches God's wondrous Word away from those who are hardened in their unbelief. St. Peter tells us about this attitude when he says, "Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

They seem like tall odds, don't they? How can we expect anyone who appears to be hardened of heart to believe? It's at this time we recall the Words from our Old Testament Lesson today where Isaiah says, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my Word that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." It is with this encouragement that we go out and spread God's wondrous Word. We have the promise that God's Word will work when and where he pleases, not when and where I please.

The second soil that we run into is the rocky soil. The first and most important thing to notice is that this soil brings forth fruit. So too, the person who is like this soil believes right away. But when the heat of persecution and the cost of being a disciple of Jesus rise and that sun starts to bake down on them, it scorches their faith and their fruit withers. For people like this, we encourage them to remove the root from themselves where it will soon run into the sinful bedrock of their pride, and move their root to the rich and black earth that is God's Word. We encourage them to be like the man found in Psalm 1 who is like a tree planted by streams of water, who yields its fruit in season, whose leaf does not wither, and whatever he does prospers.

The third soil is found when Jesus says, "Other seeds fall among the thorns which grow up and choke the plants." We all know these types, don't we? Those who come to church regularly, go to Bible class and just seem to have a good Christian life. But when troubles or hardships come in their lives, they don't view them as crosses from God but rather as painful thorns—thorns that are meant to hurt. And they cry out, "Why God? Why do you let this happen to me? Aren't I a good believer for you?" It is at this time that we need to remind these people that Jesus tells us we will have crosses in our

lives and we bear them because he wants us to. St. Peter once again has words of encouragement for us when he says, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

We have seen how the wondrous seed of God will work with hardened soil, with rocky soil and with thorny soil. We know that we can have confidence to preach to these people because God has promised us that his Word will bring forth fruit. But what about the last soil, the good soil, the soil that brings forth 100, 60 or 30-fold? Isn't that the soil that we are today by being here?

Jesus, at the end of the parable says, "He who has ears, let him hear." This is Jesus' way of saying, "Listen up!" So we return again to the verses about the types of soils and hear what Jesus has to say.

Now the first soil that we experienced is the hardened soil. Hardened soil—you are probably thinking that I said those are those people that appear to be hardened in unbelief. We are here in church today, how can we possibly be hard soil? It's at times like this that I need to be honest with myself. Do I ever lust after something or someone that I shouldn't? I do. If someone gossips about me, do I want to get back at them because they deserve it more than I do? Sadly, yes. And if we see someone who is in less respectful standing than us, if you are like me, you look down on them and think that God should be so lucky to have someone like me in his life. It's at times like this that God's Word comes to me. It comes to me in the form of his law. And it says, "Your pride needs to be crushed. That person isn't lucky to have you in their life. But by my grace, I am going to give you my law." And it crushes my stone-hard heart into a million pieces.

But it doesn't end there. No, because Christ comes and he picks up the pieces of my heart and he puts them on his back and he goes to Calvary. And when he goes to Calvary, he goes to the cross for me. My sins are still with him and the pieces of my heart are there as he endures the tortures of hell, for me. My broken pieces of my heart are with him when he goes to the grave. And three days later, he rises again. But the pieces of my heart have been transformed. No longer are they broken pieces of stone-hard heart. Rather, they are formed into a heart that is living and beating, full of love for Jesus because of all that he has done for me.

Are there places where my faith is shallow? When a disease like cancer strikes, where do I turn first? Do I turn to God who is the author and the perfecter of life, or do I place my trust in the doctors and the medicine that they provide? What about when someone we know is caught in impenitent sin? Do we confront them or do we back down, afraid of the conflict that will be caused? Or when presented with a chance to witness, do we witness or do we say, "Send someone else Lord." Yes, we do have shallow places in our faith too.

But we know how to correct this. We come to God's wondrous Word. We do so through the means of grace, experienced here at church by hearing the Word of God and through personal Bible study at home. We do so through the Lord's Supper which we attend often. And whenever we see a baptism or remember daily our own baptism,

it reminds us of our own sins that have been removed. Do any of us have hurts or problems in our lives? Has the current financial crisis struck you more than you would like? Do you have heartache or loss in your life? How do you view these things? Do you view them as painful thorns? That's the view the devil wants you to take because he knows that thorns hurt. They hurt God and they hurt us when we think this way. No, rather we need to realize that these things are crosses that Christ has told us that we will have to bear and that he is doing this to draw us closer to himself through them and that they are gifts which we should be thankful to God for.

But what about the amount of soil or fruit that the soil will bring?—do you worry whether you bring forth 100 or 60 or 30-fold? I tell you that it doesn't matter because Jesus, in the gospel of John says, "I am the vine. You are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit." Did you hear that?—the words "much fruit." A believer in Jesus will bring forth fruit automatically, and God will be satisfied with that because in his eyes, it is much.

I know that we have all probably seen a magnificent mountain or spent time with friends or family that we love, and we have seen the way a mother looks at her newborn child. Yes, these are all great and marvelous things. But we also know that we have a wondrous seed in God's Word and that it will produce a harvest with those that appear to be hardened in unbelief, shallow of faith, or worrisome and that in us, the fruitful soil, it will bring forth an abundant harvest.