

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Pentecost 6A
July 12, 2020
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Sowing In the Ear

And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. . . . 9 He who has ears, let him hear." (Matthew 13:3, 9 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

As we listen to our Lord Jesus today, be assured that He is not giving us a lesson on agriculture or teaching us not to waste seed. Instead, He would teach us something much more important than that. Today, as always, He speaks to bring people to repentance and faith in Him. He speaks to draw people to Himself and all that He offers them.

Now, to understand our Lord, one must have the Holy Spirit to teach him so that he may hear properly. He must have saving faith in Christ. But because we are by nature "dead in our trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), we must all confess that "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. . . ." If left to ourselves, we would never understand any of God's Word, much less Christ's parables.

"But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel and enlightened me with His gifts." So, to understand what this parable is about, we listen to Jesus' explanation. And as we do, we hear that a sower went out to sow. That's what a sower does after all. And as he sows, he doesn't seem very efficient since the seed falls on various types of soil. But, of course, Jesus tells us that He's not talking about sowing seeds. He's talking about the preaching of God's Word. St. Paul writes:

For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." 14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "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. (Rom. 10:13-17)

So the emphasis is not on how he sows, but that he sows generously and what happens when the seed lands on the various types of soil. It's all about the proper hearing of God's Word, and especially the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So as the seed itself has the power to grow and bear fruit, so even more so the Word of God. Thus Paul writes, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." (Rom. 1:16). Indeed, the seed of the Gospel is life-giving seed and it does produce fruit. This Gospel is Christ's Word of forgiveness, life, and salvation. And this Word is powerful and effective because it is the Word of the Word made flesh. The Gospel grows and produces fruit because it gives us Jesus Himself. For Jesus came to be our Savior, your Savior. He came to live the perfect life you and I cannot lead. He came to earn God's favor which we cannot earn. He came to give us His righteousness, which we lost through sin. He lived the holy life of love which we daily fail to live. More than that, Jesus came to satisfy God's justice. He came to die the death we deserve because of our sin. He came to suffer separation from God and to bear the full weight of God's wrath over sin. Jesus came to deliver us from death. He did this when He suffered and died on the cross, under God's judgment, the Son of God dying for sinners like you and me - a sacrifice for sin, a substitute for sinners. He thus defeated death itself.

And because of Jesus' death in our place, because the final sacrifice for sin has been made, sin has been atoned for. Jesus rose on Easter morning to show us that He had defeated Death and left it without teeth. Eternal life with God has been won. In Christ we have the forgiveness of sins. In Him we have the victory of life, now and for eternity, for He is the one who prepares our way, to lead us into the kingdom of heaven. Following Him, we enter. Without Him, we are lost. Jesus is our everything. "He who has ears, let him hear!"

Yet, this powerful, life-giving, fruit-producing seed lands on different kinds of soil, that is, it lands in different kinds of ears. Jesus is describing what happened when He preached the kingdom of God, and what would happen when the apostles, and even preachers today, preached that same word. While some heard His Word, took it to heart, and produced fruit, many didn't.

So as we listen to our Lord's explanation, let us be sure to hear with open, honest, and contrite hearts. For because of the natural hardness of our hearts, the good seed is often easy pickings for the devil. Before it can sprout and grow, the devil takes it away from us. He tries to get our eyes off Jesus, to get us distracted with other things, so that the Word won't sink in. The devil distracts us with thoughts that we'd rather be someplace else, or that there might be a more enjoyable and profitable way to spend a Sunday morning than sitting in church. The devil kindles something that is bothering us so that we don't really hear or understand the Word being sown. And as we're distracted, the devil snatches the Word away from us. This is the great danger of hardening one's heart toward God and His Word.

At other times, we receive the Word with joy, but when "tribulation or persecution" come our way because of the Word, we let it go. We turn in on ourselves. Indeed, we may be excited about the Gospel and how good it makes us feel. But then someone throws cold water on our enthusiasm. We'll stay with Christ and His church when everything is smooth and pleasant and we get our own way, but when hardship comes along on account of the Gospel, when God's Word is a hard word, then we're likely to fall away and stay away.

Furthermore, when the thorns of the cares of the world, the worries of this life, and the deceitfulness of wealth spring up, God's Word and its effect is choked out in our lives. We can become so concerned about the affairs of this life, that we don't take God's Word to heart. Or we can become so comfortable with our wealth, or our desire for it, that we feel no need for the Word. In either case, we bear no fruit. That's why Jesus warns us that we cannot serve both God and mammon (Matt. 6:24).

Yes, my friends, we are all like these three unproductive soils on any given day, and even on Sunday. At times we are distracted and the Word is snatched away before it can enter the heart. Some of us will receive the Word with joy but there is no root and, so, no fruit. Sometimes we are caught up in the pursuit of earthly comfort and personal pleasure so we may hear the Word, but it is choked off before it can bear its fruit.

And, sometimes, we pray often, this Word of God being preached to you will sink down in you, take root in your heart, spring up and grow, and produce abundant fruit. The good news of Christ will do that in you and for you. And when it does, the seed gets all the credit and you get none, for you don't make yourself good soil. *You* don't bear the good fruit. Rather, the Seed sown in you makes you good soil and bears the fruit. "He who has ears, let him hear!"

So, then, hear the Word with gladness. The Seed that is sown will turn your hard, stony heart into good soil, that is, a heart of flesh (Ezek. 11:19). Through the preaching of the Law and repentance, God will make of you good soil in which His Seed of the Gospel will take root, grow to maturity, and bear abundant fruit. Yes, God Himself will do everything needed for the Word to grow in your life, so that it will be a healthy plant, bearing the fruits of faith. Thus, God sends His preachers to you, to keep on bringing you the Word. Jesus feeds you with all the nutrients you need, with the rich food of His heavenly feast. The Holy Spirit implants in your heart the Word sown in your ear, and He waters that Seed with the ever-flowing waters of Holy Baptism. Yes, God has sown His good Seed in your ear, and He will cause that Seed to grow within you and to bear fruit. Listen to His Word even now, "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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