

Dear Christian, My Word Has Made You Grow!

(Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23) That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear.” ¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

In Christ Jesus whose Word gives light and life, dear fellow redeemed,

Some of you might remember an old Mastercard commercial that poked fun of Monday morning quarterbacks – you know, the people that get everything right with the help of 20/20 hindsight. The TV commercial featured Packer legend Brett Farve who could be seen observing a series of mishaps from spilled ice cream to a broken watermain. In each case Farve would announce, in a rather arrogant tone, what it is that he would have done differently in order to avert the disaster. My favorite came at the end of the commercial. Farve meets up with a couple coming out of a grocery store just in time to see one of their grocery bags split open and its contents splatter across the cement. As the screen fades to black you hear Farve say: “I would have double bagged it.” Monday morning quarterbacks? Priceless. For everything else, there’s Mastercard.

There’s a Monday morning quarterback in each of us – an arrogant spirit that always knows better. Most of the time our arrogance is simply annoying. People quickly learn to dismiss us at “know-it-alls.” But that same arrogance turns deadly for us when we second-guess the way that God goes about his work in our lives and our world. Today the Scriptures teach us that there is no room for our arrogance and certainly no need to ever question God. He always knows exactly what to do and he always does it perfectly. This is the truth God speaks to us under the theme: Dear Christian, My Word Has Made You Grow! First, consider how God’s Word has made us grow in the face of tremendous opposition.

There’s a war going on at this very moment, a spiritual war – a battle for souls – being fought between God and Satan. You and I can’t see all the combatants with our eyes as this war is fought in the spiritual realm. But we often see and feel the effects of the battle. That was certainly true of Jesus’ first disciples. As they watched Jesus make advances in this war, Satan pushed back, turning hearts against Jesus. In Matthew 12 you’ll find the people’s spiritual leaders slandering Jesus, insisting that he was driving out demons by the power of the devil. In a bizarre twist, those same

leaders demanded that Jesus do a miracle to prove he is who he claims to be. Jesus tells them: **“A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”** (Mathew 12:39-40). And then, when it looked like things couldn’t get any worse for Jesus, his mother and brothers showed up to take charge of Jesus saying, **“He’s out of his mind.”** (Mark 3:21).

Again and again, as Jesus laid out for people the clear truth about himself and his kingdom, he and his teachings were met with growing opposition. So Jesus counters this resistance by beginning to use stories to present kingdom truths, a strategy that prompts the disciples to ask: **“Why do you speak to the people in parables?”** (Matthew 13:10). Is this a case of Monday morning quarterbacking, or simple curiosity on the part of the disciples? I can’t read their hearts, but I know my own. Why is Jesus telling stories when it seems like it’s time for some “shock and awe”? I know at least two of the disciples came to that thought sometime later when Jesus met resistance in a Samaritan village. The brothers James and John, nicknamed “The Sons of Thunder,” asked him: **“Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?”** (Luke 9:54). Now that’s the way to advance the Kingdom of God! Or is it? How quickly I forget, that as I question God’s will and work, I put myself in the crosshairs of the very payback that I’m calling for. If that’s how I want God to deal with sinners, shouldn’t he start with me and then move on to you?

So before we get carried away with the notion that we’ve got better ways of doing things than God does, our loving Lord Jesus calls us to repentance with a simple story by which he explains the beauty and wisdom of his ways and works. Jesus uses everyday pictures from the world around him to show that the saving truth he speaks about his mission and ministry is the most powerful force in all the earth. This is the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, a story in which Jesus is the Sower, his Word is the seed, and the soil represents the hearts and minds of sinners. Some seed falls along the path – hard-packed soil that represents sinners who refuse to give the Word even a second thought. They’ve already made up their minds that Jesus is a fake, his followers are fools and there’s nothing to be gained by listening to a word he has to say. Just like that, the devil snatches the word away from them before it can take root. A second group of sinners is represented by the shallow soil that covers rocks and stones. Such people receive Jesus’ teaching with joy, but no sooner does it take root when it dies for lack of depth. Jesus tells us that these people quickly fall away when the word they’ve welcomed into their lives causes them a measure of trouble and pain. Perhaps these people thought that their new-found faith would guarantee an earthly life of ease. They never imagined that the world would hate them because it hates Jesus. Feeling burned by Christ, they quickly disown him. Still another group of people is represented by the soil filled with thorns and thistles. The Word that lands on such hearts is soon choked off by the worries of this world – worries that pertain mostly to the pursuit of earthly wealth. These people have no time to take to heart what the Scripture’s truth means to them now and for their future because they are too busy buying into the lie that just a little more money will solve their problems. They have no time for Jesus.

If the parable stopped here, you’d have to conclude that Jesus’ message is an epic fail. Three strikes and you’re out! But that’s simply not the case. The parable doesn’t end in failure. There’s nothing wrong with the seed. For we learn that it lands on another group of sinners, those represented by what Jesus calls “good soil.” Now, because this is your story, dear Believer, I must add a word of caution: You can take no credit for being good soil. No, by reason of the sin that we inherited at our conception, we are as dense, dead, and damned by nature as the next sinner. To think or believe otherwise, leaves us eternally damned. But God does not leave us so. This parable is the picture of what God is doing for us and in us. “Dear Christian” he says, “my Word has made

you grow.” Jesus sowed his life-giving seed in us at our Baptism. By grace, and grace alone, saving faith has sprung to life in us and thrives in our hearts to this day. What a miracle of love! You know this is all God’s doing. For as I described all the opposition to God’s saving Word, as I told you about the people who want nothing to do with God’s Word, you could identify with all of them, could you not? Be honest. You’ve had moments, perhaps even during this last week, when the thought crossed your mind that Jesus’ is a fake. You’ve thought to yourself: “What has he done for me lately?” You faced and felt the heat of some problem, and thought, “If he loves me so little that he won’t fix this, he’s not worth my time.” And speaking of time, how often did it happen this past week that you were taken in by the notion that money, not Jesus, is the source of your security now and in the years to come? All that opposition, and yet here you are, still clinging to Jesus for forgiveness for these and all your sins. How can that be? It’s the power of the Word!

But still there’s the question: “If the Word is so powerful, why so many unbelievers?” On this side of heaven, you and I will never find an answer to this question – at least not one that totally satisfies our finite brains. Here’s what we know from Scripture: God “**...wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.**”(1 Timothy 2:4). Think of the sower scattering saving seed everywhere! No one is lost because God doesn’t love them or want them. When someone rejects Jesus, it is the fault of the sinner and the sinner alone. What the parable teaches us is that the gospel seed of grace not irresistible. God doesn’t force people to believe in him. Instead he takes his saving love and power and puts them out there in plain sight. The problem is with us sinners who judge God’s saving plan as weak and foolish.

Take Jesus for example. If you were going to send a Savior to the world to storm the gates of hell and rescue sinners from Satan’s clutches, what would that Savior look like? I would send Rambo. What did God do? He sent his Son as a baby, one grows up so meek and mild that when his enemies come for him, he won’t even summon his angels to help. Instead he told his Father, “**...not my will but yours be done.**” (Luke 22:42). He lived those words and then he died by them. As he hung on that cross, he must have appeared to be the weakest, most defeated soul on earth. But the Word that God has planted in you, has convinced you otherwise. It has made you grow its promise that tremendous blessings are yours in Christ. For example, you know that Jesus’ perfect life of humility is yours through the faith God has worked in you. Instead of seeing sinners who question his ways and so often doubt his plans for them, God looks right at you and sees Jesus’ perfect obedience cloaking every ounce of your arrogance and every bit of your defiance. It’s all hidden in Christ. It’s all forgiven, you are forgiven, because what looked to be Jesus’ defeat was his greatest triumph. For as he hung dying on that cross, he was paying for every last sin of every last sinner, including yours. You will never suffer God’s anger, not now, not ever because Jesus finished his saving work on your behalf and proved it! He fulfilled that sign of Jonah, rising from the grave on the third day to free himself and all of us from death’s eternal grip.

Dear Christian, God’s Word has made you grow with its promise of tremendous blessings. As you study this Word with us, as you meditate on it for yourself and with your family, it will produce fruit in the form of ever-growing faith and a life that conforms more and more to God’s will and ways. Don’t doubt it, dear Christian. Enjoy it! Don’t keep it to yourself. Share it, trusting that what God has done for you, he also wants to do for those you know and meet.

Remember, there’s no reason to play Monday morning quarterback when it comes to what God is busy doing in your life and in our world. No, what is truly priceless, is the peace that comes from knowing that God’s ways are not our ways. His plans are so much better, working for us blessings that we can’t always see, but from which we are sure to benefit now and forever. Amen.