

7-16-23

7th Sunday in Pentecost

Pastor Priewe

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

Theme: The Sower Sows the Seed of the Word.

This summer I've been watching the nature part of Jesus' "Parable of the Sower" play out in my wife's garden. She sowed the seeds in late spring, and soon she declared war with the birds. We must have an extra vicious breed of sparrows and robins, that not only snatch away seed, but even the little plants themselves. She replanted and put up nets and fences. Then came the May, June, July drought where all the plants and flowers were in danger of drying up and withering if she wasn't constantly watering. Then we went on vacation, and the weeds and thorns thistles moved in and threatened to take over, and the birds have still been relentlessly finding their way through the double layered net. Pretty soon, Carissa and Josie will be stationed out their with pitchforks guarding it. There's a lot of danger for the little ecosystem of her garden to endure, and we'll have to wait yet to see the harvest it produces.

Isn't it amazing that the Parable of the Sower that Jesus the master teacher taught two thousand years ago is something so simple and natural, we can watch it unfold before our eyes in nature all these years later and still get the point. The point of it all isn't for us to sit and think about gardens and planting for twenty minutes, so I better get on with it. At the very end of the parable, Jesus says, "**Whoever has ears, let them hear.**" (Matthew 13:9) The point is for us to ponder what happens in the lives of real people as they hear and react to **the Sower sowing the seed of the Word**. So today we're going to think deeply about each of the possibilities that happen when the **Sower sows the seed of the Word**.

I once sat in the living room of a man who'd been brought to hear the word of God as a boy. He told stories from some 50 years ago about his experience with "that" pastor and "that" church, and he told it with anger so fresh it was like I had done a donut in his front lawn and knocked over his mailbox on my way up the driveway. He was angry about everything the

church had ever done, and everything God had ever done. His anger was hot and his heart was cold and hard and he had no interest in hearing any more about God.

Now on the last day this man will have a judge far more righteous than me, but by all outward appearances, this seemed to be sad reality number 1 that Jesus was teaching about in the Parable of the Sower. The seed of the word fell on the hard trampled down path of a heart. It fell on deaf ears. It was heard, but not received into the soil, not understood, not believed, not cherished. It didn't spring to life, and then the devil and his demonic birds came and snatched away the seed.

It's a sad reality, but still reality nonetheless, and it's one Jesus is telling us that he, the Sower, and we, the sowers of the word, have to cope with—unresponsiveness, rejection, unbelief. Since we've been celebrating Christmas in July this week at Vacation Bible School, it brings to mind the Christmas Day Gospel lesson. **“The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world...[but] the world did not recognize him...His own did not receive him.”** (John 1:9-11).

Some will reject the word of God outright, and with it, the God who spoke those words, and the Son of God who lived and died to fulfill those words, and the Spirit of God who accompanies those words. Even God with all of his power and might and his love and grace can be rejected. He doesn't break into hearts like a robber and force his will at gunpoint. Nobody is dragged into the kingdom of heaven kicking and screaming. No, the heavenly Sower simply sows seed. He spreads his word that falls to the earth, and because this is a place that's been devastated by the reality of sin, the purpose his word accomplishes doesn't always result in faith.

That brings us to sad reality number 2. Reality number 2 is one that rips my heart out every time it seems to play out before my eyes. A new person is introduced to Jesus through the

sowing of the word. She hears the message and the seed of the word falls on her heart and quickly springs to life! But in a short amount of time, the soil proves to be shallow and rocky and there's no place to send down roots. Then the sun comes up, the heat scorches that seedling, and it withers and dies. The person who met Jesus with so much joy and excitement seems to fall away and disappear again just as quickly.

As heart wrenching as it is every time it happens, Jesus is telling us it's a reality. Even someone who seemed like they were on fire in their new life with God can suddenly turn cold and die. Jesus spells out a few reasons why. **“When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.” (Matthew 13:21)**. Maybe the person didn't realize that just because Jesus is the Savior of our soul doesn't necessarily mean that life will get easier here on earth. In fact, Jesus tells us to expect that life under the cross will probably be harder. Reality number 2 is a short spiritual lifecycle withering away to death.

The 3rd reality is not all that different because the result is the same. What distinguishes it from the 2nd sad reality is probably length and time. It's the seed that grew up in the soil over a longer period. This person heard the Word of God and it took root. Maybe it was mom's bible songs and dad's bedtime prayers and church every Sunday. Maybe it was Christian day school and catechism class. The plant grew up and became established, but then the thorns showed up. They fell in with the wrong bunch and their life went down a different path. Or they got turned off by something that happened in their life or at church. Or they went chasing after a lifestyle they can't afford and now are trapped trying to keep up with it. Jesus explained, **“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.” (Matt. 13:22)**

In this reality, nobody ever planned or intended for themselves to get choked out by the thorns, but it happened along the way. The gradual slope to death is the easiest one to slide down without realizing it. It happens as time and bad influences and unrepented sin wear away at the spiritual life. Don't be fooled as if there's no danger for us who sit here. Realize who this reality is the biggest danger to! This one happens to living plants, to believers and it results in them being unbelievers. This one happens to people who've been around the block a while, but aren't careful about weeding out the thorns and thistles from their life. Maybe this one has happened to someone who you wish to God were here sitting with you today but isn't. Or maybe this is an untreated reality that's been slowly festering right under your nose in your own heart. This part of the parable is a wake-up call for everyone of us to watch out so that we don't fall. And it's a warning to any of us who would leave our spiritual welfare sitting on the backburner. Watch out before the thorns come and choke out life!

Now I'll admit, it's not fun or uplifting to realize that 3 out of the 4 possibilities end in the seed dying, in unbelief and spiritual death. It's an even harder reality to wrap our mind around the fact that these are the reactions not just to our ministry, but even to Jesus the perfect Son of God, the preacher of Good News, the one who came to free the captives. And it breaks Jesus' heart even more than ours that anyone should perish. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn and live. And that's why you see the sower sowing the seed of the word in all these different places. He doesn't save it for only what he thinks is good soil but spreads it far and wide in all these different places, knowing that much of his effort will not result in plants that spring up into life that lasts to eternity. Still he sows, freely, graciously, abundantly. He sends his word into hard and rocky places, into bad situations and places where

the thorns also grow. See in this zealous Sower the grace of the God who broadcasts his Word far and wide, sowing and planting that he might have a harvest of life.

Finally we come to the last possibility, the good one. When the seed has been sown, the Spirit goes to work, tending and nurturing that seed in the soil with wisdom and understanding from on high so that we can see with our eyes and hear with our ears all that his word has declared to be done for us. **“God made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.” (Ephesians 2:5).** He grants to us the water of life in baptism and a washing for the forgiveness of sins that brings new birth into life with Jesus. Since we’re celebrating Christmas in July, it reminds me of the grace that the brilliant hymnwriter was talking about in the Christmas hymn *Where Shepherds Lately Knelt*. He asks, *“Can I, will I forget how Love was born, and burned, its way into my heart—unasked, unforced, unearned, to die to live and not alone for me, to die to live, and not alone for me?”*¹

Jesus did it for me with out my asking or earning. The seed that falls on good soil refers to the heart that by the grace of God, grasps the truth at the center of the Word, the message of the cross. Like the kids were singing this week in their VBS Christmas song. It’s kind of a new one called “It’s About the Cross”. *“It’s about the cross. It’s about my sin. It’s about how Jesus came to be born once so that we could be born again. It’s about God’s Son, nailed to a tree. It’s about every drop of blood that flowed from him when it should have been me. It’s about the stone, that was rolled away, so that you and I could have real life someday. It’s about the cross!”*²

The one who understands this truth is the one growing in Christ. And this is the faith that God preserves in us as we come to be nurtured day after day by his word for an entire lifetime.

¹ Vajda, Jaroslav. “Where Shepherds Lately Knelt” Christian Worship 21 #345

² “It’s About the Cross” The Ball Brothers

It's not about our endurance, our perseverance, our willpower to keep ourselves in the faith. You've seen how many times that willpower has broken. It's about us growing and being nourished by the **“gospel which is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes,”** (Romans 1:16). This is what preserves us in the faith until the day of his coming.

“This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” (Matthew 13:23). The believer who has been brought to life naturally produces a crop. It's a wonderful truth of nature that the crop or the fruit that's been harvested is what holds the seeds for the next round of planting. God has grown you, dear believer in Christ, into the fruit of his harvest and also made you to be the next sower of his word. He has commissioned you to freely and graciously cast seed into the fields where you live and work, that he might have a harvest of life from your work in his name. Praise be to God who has sown his word in our hearts and given us his word to sow in this world. Lord, we pray that you keep us steadfast in your word all our lives. Amen.