

"The Soil and the Sower"

Matthew 13:1-9

July 12, 2020

Matthew 13:1-9 – "That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about Him, so that He got into a boat and sat there; and the whole crowd stood on the beach. And He told them many things in parables..."

Dear friends in Christ,

We have, in today's Gospel lesson, a well-known parable of Jesus—the Parable of the Sower. The Sower goes to sow seed upon his field. Some of the seed falls on the wayside, where the birds eat it. Some fall on stony places, only to be scorched by the sun. Some fall among thorns and are choked to death by the aggressive weeds. Finally, some fall on good ground and yield a crop.

Let us examine this parable a little bit more in depth, and learn some lessons from the soil and Sower.

I. Lessons from the Soil

Whenever this parable is discussed, it seems that the dirt gets most of the attention; we will begin there as well. As far as understanding what the different types of dirt signify, we have it easy: The Lord Himself tells us what they mean:

He says: "Therefore hear the parable of the sower: "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. As for what was sown on the good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and produces: in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty" (Matt. 13:18-23).

The first lesson we learn is this general observation: When the Word of God is proclaimed—when the seed is sown in the mission field, many will hear, but not all will believe. And some who believe will later fall away. Not every seed takes root; and some that do are scorched or choked later on.

Therefore, the second lesson is this: Although this parable is usually applied to the making of new converts, it applies to all Christians throughout their lives. Even now, you are the soil of this parable.

As you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has died to take away your sins, you have cause to rejoice: The Lord-Sower, Christ Himself, has planted His Word in you. He has announced to you that you are forgiven for all of your sins, and He has granted you the faith to believe it. He continues to sustain you

in the one true faith by His Word and His Sacraments; and by this parable, He warns you against those things that would make you fall away.

By this parable, the Lord commands you to continue in the study of His holy Word—for the one who does not understand or care about His doctrine is susceptible to all sorts of tempting birds. It is popular today to say, “It is enough that I believe in Jesus. I do not need to study more; I do not need to know about other doctrines, for I have faith in the Lord.” Like so many popular things, this is a dangerous, misleading notion. Throughout life, you will be confronted with all sorts of crises and dilemmas, involving family, morality, end-of-life issues, and many more. The Lord has much to teach about these things in His Word. Now, if you say, “I believe in Jesus, I do not need to learn more from Him,” it doesn’t mean that you are learning nothing at all; it means that you are learning only from other sources—the TV news, magazine articles, different sources that teach the world’s seductive, non-Scriptural point of view. You will be taught to believe in evolution rather than creation, to accept sexual deviancy as normal, Christian values as out of date. Many a Christian who does so slowly adopts the world’s point of view, and eventually find himself believing that he believes in Jesus, but disagrees with His Word. This destroys faith. Therefore, our Lord calls for us to hear His Word, study it, understand it.

Similarly, the Lord calls for you to continue in His Word, lest you are scorched like a seedling in the sun. Planting a seed is no good if the seedling isn’t watered, and faith dies if it is not continually nurtured by the Lord’s Word. Please note that Jesus is speaking especially of tribulation or persecution that arises because of the Word. There are all sorts of other trials in life which are punishing enough—illness, family disagreements, financial loss, and more; and in all of these troubles, the one who has continued in the faith is far more prepared to endure than the one who has kept his roots shallow and his faith superficial. However, far more destructive are tribulations which arise about the faith. When false teachings are introduced into the Church, they are usually introduced as good and right and godly. Many people, who might be very nice but have little grounding in the Scriptures, will follow such teachings because they seem to be good according to their human reasoning. When the Church condemns the teaching on the basis of Scripture, they condemn the Church as wrong and accuse it of opposing Christ. They may seek to speak evil of the Church when they have opportunity, and they will close their ears to the Gospel. Why? Because their faith is scorched because they had no root in the Word, and were unprepared for the suffering that a Christian will endure in this life.

The Lord further bids us to beware, lest we sacrifice our faith in favor of the cares of the world or the deceitfulness of riches. The world has plenty of cares and worries, but those who are grounded in the Word of God know that He will provide daily bread, and that He has numbered the hairs on their heads. They will understand that the troubles of this world do not mean that God has forgotten them, and will trust that He is present with them to sustain them in the time of trial. Those who are not so grounded in the Word may mistakenly believe that troubles mean that God has abandoned them; and so they will abandon God. Likewise, those who are fed by the Word know that there is a danger in riches, for they too easily become a god. In 1 Timothy, chapter 6 St. Paul writes: “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many sorrows”. Those who make riches a priority will find that they have made wealth their god:

But wealth is a demanding god that always requires more work at the expense of other blessings. It is a god that often destroys households and health. It is a god that kills, but it raises no one from the dead.

Therefore, our Lord warns us of some dangerous sins. Do not neglect the Word. Feed upon it continually so that you can be prepared for troubles, especially those tribulations that come on account of the Word. Hear and meditate upon it so that you will be prepared to handle both riches and poverty. Even then, understand that, daily, your old sinful nature seeks to neglect the Word, to worry and seek after riches; but by the Word, you know to confess these sins and be forgiven, for by that forgiveness your faith is strengthened. It is such people of God who bear fruit— some thirty, some sixty and some a hundredfold.

We find one more lesson from the soil: We have applied it to individuals, but now we apply it to the Church and evangelism. With evangelism programs today, it is a trendy thing to predict numerical results: “Within three years, the churches in this program will add 3000 new members.” It is also assumed that a congregation should be measured by the number of members and how fast that number is growing. Sometimes, a congregation and pastor may be criticized when a series of visitors attend the service, but few or none actually become members; it is used as evidence that the pastor and congregation must not be friendly. In all three cases, there is a flaw in the reasoning. The flaw is this belief: that the life of the Church is measured by the soil; that the health of the Church is measured by the number of people.

This is a great flaw! People are sinful, and our Lord warns us that there are all sorts of different kinds of dirt out there. A congregation may not grow because it is in an area of people who are highly opposed to the truth of God’s Word; a congregation that grows greatly may not proclaim the Gospel at all.

Visitors may not return because they don’t believe what we teach and practice, whether the members are friendly or not. Do not judge a church by the dirt: Dirt changes. It blows away, muddies up, fills with thorns and gets scorched by the sun. No, a church is to be judged by what doesn’t change: The Sower and His seed—our Lord and His Word. If these are faithfully proclaimed, the Church is alive and well.

These are lessons from the soil of the parable. The Lord warns us against those things that would pull us away from the Word and the faith; He proclaims to us that it is the Word that does the work, and to rely on other means for growth is folly.

However, it is time for some better news. The dirt is important, don’t misunderstand. However, if we look only to the dirt and how we fail to focus on the Word, we will end up only dirty. If we focus only on the soil, we remain soiled. No, there is better news in this parable: Let us look at the Sower.

2. The Lesson of the Sower

Look closely at the farming method of the Sower, for it’s not quite what one would expect. The Sower doesn’t carefully survey the fields to find the fertile ground; He doesn’t painstakingly calculate the

fertile acreage where He can get the best return. In other words, He doesn't just plant His seed where He knows a lot will grow. He flings it everywhere! Some of it falls on fertile soil, true; but some of it falls along the roadside, where the birds will get most of it. Some of it lands outside the plowed field on the untilled ground where the thorns wear the crown. Some of it falls among the rocks, where a sprig or two might shoot up—but much of the seed will come to naught.

It seems a bit reckless on the part of the Sower, just flinging the seed willy-nilly like this. Seed is precious and expensive; one would think He would be a bit more careful. However, with this Sower, we draw two conclusions: First, He wants to grow crops wherever possible, so He'll throw that seed around everywhere. Second, He's going to get His full harvest, and the cost is not important. He's not concerned about the expense—He'll pay the price, whatever it takes.

This Sower is your Lord. He is not reckless, but purposeful. He is not careless; He is extravagant with His planting. He earnestly desires all to be saved. The cost is high, but He has paid the price. The cost of your salvation is His holy, precious blood, and His bitter suffering and death. For your sake, He has borne your sins to the cross. For your life, He has died your death. Where we fail to act with fruitful kindness toward others, He has suffered the greatest unkindness of the cross. Where we neglect the Word, He does not; He is, after all, the Word made flesh, and He cannot deny Himself. Yet, He's suffered at the cross for our neglect of the Word, and speaks forgiveness to us. Where we waver when confronted with persecution and tribulation at the hands of man, He has suffered the tribulation of His Father's judgment so that He might pardon us. Where we are distracted by the cares and riches of the world, He gives up everything—including His life—to give us the one thing we do need, the forgiveness of sins.

The price of salvation is steep; but it is paid in full for you. It is paid for you, and it is paid for all the world; therefore, the Lord spreads His Word throughout the world, so that many might hear and be saved. He does not say, "This nation is far too Islamic or has too many worshipers of Buddha or Hindus, so I shall pass them by;" He spreads the Word, sometimes just by whispers from house to house, and the Church grows even under persecution. He does not say, "There is no one in this household who believes, so I will not give them a chance." He spreads His Word as friend invites friend to church, and one or two in the household believe. He showers rain upon the world; and where the rain falls, plants grow. He showers His Word upon the world, and where that Word is proclaimed, people come to faith. In some places, the harvest is great. In other places the harvest is small. But wherever the Word is, the seed will take root; and the Lord will not forget a single one of those who believes.

He redeems His Church by His blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Rev. 5:9). And among those of every tribe and tongue and people and nation are His children in Edmonton, Alberta; and He is present today, visiting some of the harvest. He showers us with His Word—His Word which gives life, shoos away the birds of false teaching, cuts down the thorns and gets rid of rocks; His Word which proclaims that the price has been paid, and that you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.