

This Sunday's texts:  
Jonah 3:1-10  
Romans 10:9-15  
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

**God's People**  
**Pastor Jim Cords**  
**January 29, 2023**

The holy gospel for today comes to us from Matthew 13:

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that He got into a boat and sat in it while all the people stood on the shore. Then He told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As He scattered the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among the thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear." ... "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 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. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the Word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble and persecution comes because of the Word, they quickly fall away. 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. 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."

The gospel of the Lord. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, as we hear Your Word, we pray that it would bear fruit in our lives for You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The parable of the sower and the seed in some ways this parable ought to be easy for us because it's one of those parables for which we have an explanation, not something that happens very often in Scripture, but when it does, it's very helpful. I'd like to say, however, that one of the things we want to recognize, when we're reading the Scripture and we come across a parable, is that probably that parable has multiple insights available from it and not simply one idea with one interpretation. That may be true with a lot of scripture, but I

think it's especially true with parables. The more you mull on the story, the more insights seem to come along. For several people, that has been such a strong insight into the parable of the sower that they decided to change its name. That's pretty brazen, given the fact that the Scripture itself says that this is the parable of the sower. Some people like to call it the parable of the sower and the seed and some like to call this the parable of the four soils. But again that simply speaks to the fact that there are numerous insights available from this parable.

Now I'm not sure how you hear this parable in your own life, how you've interpreted it, how you have responded to it, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, as you've heard it likely many times in your life. My brain in my journey has gone in several different directions and I want to start with this word of encouragement. If the seed is the Word of God, then the Word of God is enormously valuable to us. It is, in fact, the very source of how our lives can be fruitful. So I want us to be encouraged by the promises God gives us in His Word and through His Word. I want to continue to encourage you to make the hearing, the reading of His Word a part of your daily routine and ritual, so that God might speak well and bear fruit in your life.

Now, one of the questions we might ask of this parable is who exactly the sower is. Are there different ways to think about who the sower is? On the one hand, the sower has to be God, but I want to remind you that God often brings His Word, His Seed through His messengers. One of the people or groups of identity, of being I suppose, that we hear about in Scripture is the angels. The word angel literally means messenger. Then, of course, we also know that the prophets were sent to speak for God. Then hopefully, we've been hearing, over the course of our years in worship, that we are ambassadors of Christ. We bear His Word to the world. So there are several different answers to who that sower is and yet fundamentally, it's critical that we understand that it is the Holy Spirit that works the seed. It is the promise of God and the power of His Word that has the ability to give life and to bear fruit. So we don't take credit for it when we share it. We don't take credit for it when it bears fruit in our lives. But we delight that we can be ambassadors for Christ and we delight that His Word can bear fruit in our lives, to the glory of our Lord and Savior.

A couple of weeks ago, I was gone to the memorial service for Marilyn's brother, Lee. Lee was a pastor. He was an incredibly humble and gifted man of God. He showed a love and acceptance of others that brought incredible encouragement to me over our life together and we miss him dearly. One of Lee's favorite verses and sometimes he would do it, especially on occasions when he

was barefoot. He would talk about the fact “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the Word of God”<sup>1</sup> and he would stick up his ugly feet. I thought about putting some ugly feet on the screen, but couldn't find any quite appropriate. Why is it that the feet of those who bring Good News are beautiful? Is it because they're literally beautiful feet? I hope not. I inherited what I will call not beautiful feet. My mother had lots of trouble with her feet and I think I joined her. I have what I would call a shy toe. Anybody else have a shy toe, where that one next to the little sticks under the one in the middle? Yeah, that's my feet. But how beautiful are the feet of him who brings the Good News? Of her who brings the good news? Why is that? It's because when someone comes and blesses your life, when someone comes and expresses love for you, their love, God's love for you, you're glad to see them. You know they bring and embrace a spirit and life. You know that they're bringing a Word that God will use to mold you, to shape you, and to bless you. Therefore you're glad to see them. It is beautiful in your eyes that they are coming.

Well, I do want to also address the negative place my mind sometimes goes in this parable because I think one of the things we often will do is identify with a soil type. I don't know about you, but because of the competitive nature with which I was raised and which I embrace, if it's not a hundredfold, it's no good. Sixty and thirty? Nah! You're either a hundred or you're nothing at all. So since I'm aware I'm not a hundred, I often then look at the stony ground, the thorny ground, and the path. And I wonder why can't I be better soil? And often, my brain and maybe it's the temptation of the devil or something along those lines, wants me to think that once you're one type of soil, that that's all there is to that. But that's not the truth, is it? Soils change. How many of you have changed the soil in your garden or lawn? Yep, a lot of hands went up. So what I want to suggest to *you* is that if you can change the soil in your garden and lawn, then *God* can change the soil that is your heart and life.

I also want to suggest that one of the other ways we want to interpret this is the various categories of our life. Because I think in some ways, we are good soil. We are very open and eager to have God involved and engaged in shaping us. Sometimes, there are other areas of our lives where we're too worried or other areas where we would say “God, just leave that one alone for a little while, please. I don't need You to butt into that one. I'm not ready.” Do you understand what I'm saying, as we compartmentalize our lives?

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 10:13

So let's think a little further. It's true, is it not, that pastors only work one day a week? [laughter] It's true, is it not, that farmers only work only two weeks out of the year? When they do the planting and when they do the harvesting? It's really silly to think that kind of stuff, isn't it? So farmers spend time preparing the soil, planting the seed, nurturing and caring for the seed, before they get to the harvest and start again. And I'm skipping, I'm sure, what any farmer would know are multiple additional steps in that process. In fact, most of the farmers I know are among the hardest workers I know. So perhaps we might ask the question of this parable. How can the soil of our lives be prepared? How might we prepare our soil in such a way that God's Word has more opportunity to take root in our lives? Are there ways that, maybe, we might remove the weeds? Not in such a way that the current seeds get pulled out along with the weeds, as another parable suggests, but simply as a way to prepare the soil for the Word that will come.

I've talked to a number of people who have tried this daily Bible reading. There almost always comes a time when there are a few days in a row, sometimes even a few weeks in a row, when it just feels flat - like I showed up, but God didn't seem to show up - because I didn't get much out of it. Now I hate to admit this, but there are a lot of you that actually told me that, when we started last January to read through the Bible in here and you were reading in the Old Testament, you were going like argh. The person who taught me the S.O.A.P. method encouraged in the introduction of it this insight: I don't have any idea what tomorrow may bring, but God does. I go to His word trusting that He will give me what I need for today and that He will prepare me for what He knows I will need for tomorrow. I don't recognize it when I'm getting it, but it bears fruit in the days ahead. By the way, it was a similar thing in athletics, when our coaches told us to do such stupid things, that often hurt and made no sense, only later to realize that it bore fruit in our games and in our Improvement. God is able to work in us today that which is needed for Him to work through us tomorrow.

I also want to suggest that we believe that God is able to work in the soil of our lives, that we would let go of the sin or despair or shame or whatever that causes us to identify as shallow or thorn-ridden or bad soil, and believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to change our hearts in such a way that God is able to shape and mold us more into His likeness. Now, this idea that we are to grow more and more like Jesus is an idea that I often hear a response from, especially among my Lutheran friends, and I have *a lot* of Lutheran friends, who want to suggest "No, no, no, we could never be fully like Jesus." The problem is again that

awareness of our sin seems to cause us to put limits on ourselves. I want to suggest to you that God is not limited the way you are, that God is, in fact, able to change our hearts and our lives in ways that we could never even imagine. So let us trust and be confident that God is able to do in us whatever He desires to do, whatever it is He wants to do, and we can feel the joy of fruitfulness by the hand of God at work through us in our lives.

Let me also suggest that there's another insight as it relates to this text. One of the strange things about this text is that the sower seems to be undiscerning. I mean, if I had to buy a bunch of seed, I think I would be a little more careful to try to get it all on the good soil where I was later coming to harvest because I probably wouldn't plan to harvest among the thorns or on the path. So why such an indiscriminate scattering of seeds? I want to suggest to you that we think for a moment that you, children of God, ambassadors of Christ, are the sower. I want to suggest to you that you sow the way the sower in this parable did, indiscriminately to everyone and anyone who might be there to hear, that your life would be a constant witness in one way or another and you would not seek to know or choose to decide whether or not you're talking to a path or good soil or thorny soil, but that you would allow God to be the one to discern that. I also want to suggest to you, and this is going beyond the parable, that it's quite possible that the Word you share will be a part of what God uses to prepare the soil in their lives. I want to remind you that God has other ambassadors that will follow you and perhaps take what you shared to a deeper level, as He moves forward in the lives of those He loves who have not yet known how to love him. Often, God uses a plethora of people, a company of saints, to touch the lives of those He loves. So be willing to scatter the seed and trust God to do something good in it.

Let me also suggest. If you are the soil, that we learn from what Pastor Joe preached about last week, when he was preaching about the fact that Jesus chose and sent the twelve disciples, that He picked or He asked them to pick a person of peace. He said, "As you enter the home, give it your greeting. [Sow your seed, give it your greeting.] If the home is deserving, let the peace rest on it. If it is not, let your peace return to you."<sup>2</sup> and then He says, "Shake the dust off your feet and move on."<sup>3</sup> I want to suggest this for you as a sower. When you see someone receive the Word gladly from you, you stay and invest in that relationship and continue to nurture the seed. Be willing to invest in the lives that Jesus connects

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 10:12-13

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 10:14

you with if they are open and desirous and welcoming of hearing the witness you bring. It is a part of evangelism. It is a part of discipleship. It is often something we miss in our understanding of God's calling upon our lives as His people.

Not only that, but it is also the way God invests in us. When you experience someone in your life, who shares God's Word with you, in word or in deed, when you feel the blessing of another brother or sister in Christ and your faith is encouraged by them, invest in that relationship. Spend more time with them. Give yourselves an opportunity for their life and their witness to prepare your soil, to nurture the seeds planted, so that they can be an encouragement for you to grow in faith. One of my understandings of discipleship, as I was called to come to be the lead Pastor here at St Timothy's was an understanding that among God's people, we are able to see God's gifts in others and we are called to encourage those gifts and give them the opportunity to use them. I believe that's a way a church grows up the disciples of Jesus. I believe that's the way God can bless your life. I believe it is precisely the way God will call you to bless other people's lives through you. Lord, make us good soil that we might bear fruit for You. A.men