

Sexagesima - 2009 Feb. 13-14, 2009 Luke 8:4-15 "The Sower and the Seed"

Trinity Lutheran Church, Girard, Illinois

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Today's Gospel begins by telling us that a great multitude had gathered before Jesus and that people had come to Him from every city. Everyone had heard about Him and wanted to see Him. But Jesus' purpose was not to satisfy the curiosity seekers. Jesus' teaching and miracles were not about impressing the multitudes but about ushering in the kingdom of God. So to the crowds, who came with a variety of motivations and agendas, Jesus spoke in parables and mysteries and riddles, so that the unfaithful who do not seek the kingdom of God would be driven away and left in ignorance, but that true disciples might be drawn in to discover and grasp the meaning hidden in Jesus' words.

You see, Christ's church is not supposed to be a place where the masses feel comfortable and everyone likes what they see and understands what's going on. People walk through these doors, too, for a whole variety of reasons, many of which have nothing to do with the kingdom of God. So if the church is truly proclaiming Christ's Word, the result should be the same as when Jesus taught: the unrepentant will be left unsatisfied and driven away, but the repentant will be drawn in to receive the gifts of Christ. Remember what Jesus said in the parable: in three out of four cases, the sowing of the seed comes to no effect. All the church is to worry about, then, is faithfully preaching and teaching the Word of God, and trusting that the seed of His Word will not return to Him empty but will accomplish the purpose for which He sent it.

In the first instance, the seed that is sown falls on the hardened path. It can't penetrate the soil, and so it is eaten by the birds. This symbolizes those with a heart that is hardened to the Word of God. They may hear the Word or know about the Word, but they don't listen to it. They may understand it mentally to some extent, but it doesn't penetrate their heart. And one of the ways in which the devil hardens many people's hearts to God's Word is by calling the Word into question, getting you to doubt its trustworthiness. It will be suggested that you can't trust the Bible because it's been copied so many times throughout the centuries that we can't even be sure it's accurate anymore. Of course, we have boatloads of evidence to the contrary, assuring us that the reliability of the Scriptures is greater than any other ancient document we accept as reliable. But still, some will use that as an excuse not even to give God's Word a hearing. Others will dismiss the Bible as being a relic of some

past patriarchal, sexist, morally oppressive world view, and in that way will avoid its actual message. They'll mock it as something that only the intellectually weak and foolish rely on.

There's another more subtle way that people's hearts are hardened to God's Word. It happens when people say things like, **"Oh yeah, I believe in God; I just don't need to go to church."** In this way they deceive themselves into thinking they have faith, all while they studiously avoid hearing the Word of God which creates and sustains true faith. No Christian wants to stay away week after week from the place where Christ the Savior is present in divine service. To say you're a Christian without going to church is sort of like saying, **"Yeah, I love my wife. I just don't want to talk with her or spend any time with her."**

Unless we become guilty of only pointing the finger at others, we also are hardening our hearts to the Word whenever we hear a Scripture reading or a sermon and think to ourselves, **"That really applies to so and so a few pews behind me,"** or **"I sure wish a couple people I know were here to listen to this. They really need to hear it."** That may be true, but to think in that way is a sign of a hardened heart, to let the seed of the Word bounce off of you and say, **"This doesn't apply to me but to someone else."**

In the second instance, the seed was sown on stony ground, a thin layer of dirt over hard rocks. This symbolizes those who initially have a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement for the faith. They seem to be growing so quickly. But when things start to get too difficult, when life becomes a mess, then the doubts and questions creep in. Their once seemingly strong faith is now shown to be only a surface faith, easily scorched by the heat of testing and temptation. It is based on the shifting sands of emotions or on how much they like the pastor or certain people in the church. Their faith is not deeply rooted in God's words and promises but on how well He's coming through for them right now. In the end when it becomes clear that following Christ means real repentance, getting out of the easy chair and taking up the cross, they become offended; they stumble and fall away. They wither spiritually, never having been firmly rooted in the faith. This calls to mind the Scriptural warning, **"Let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall."**

In the third instance, the seed lands among the thorns that choke out the young seedlings. This symbolizes how many hear the Word of Christ and believe it, but then they fail to mature in the faith because there are so many other things clamoring for your attention, wanting to be the top priority in your life, that faith in the Word of Christ gets choked off. The one thing that is truly needful gets ignored. This is a huge challenge for a Christian in a

market-driven culture like ours. It's not that anybody tells you to ignore the practice of your Christian faith. It's just that there are so many pleasures and distractions and diversions offered to you that you end up becoming spiritually paralyzed. The thorns of the world sink their poison into you and you're left anesthetized in front of your new high definition television or your computer screen, desensitized to what's going on in the world, numb to the things of God. There's 168 hours in a week, and yet we can hardly find 15 minutes a day to pray and meditate on the Scriptures, there's just so much else that has to be done first. Even here in church the thorns try to crowd your mind and divert your attention to other things so that you can't dwell on God's Word as you should.

So let us be on guard against giving ourselves over to what Jesus mentions here: the cares, riches, and pleasures of life. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus refers in this parable to the **"deceitfulness of wealth."** Don't buy into the lie that if you just devote yourself to pursuing that mammon a little bit more or a little bit longer that suddenly everything will be better. The finish line keeps moving and if you ever do cross it, you'll find it's only the edge of a cliff. As Jesus said, **"What does it profit a man if he gains the world and loses his own soul?"**

As you hopefully can see, this parable is meant to shake us up and knock us in the head. *For who among us here cannot see himself or herself in one or more of these first three soils? Who here can claim to be that fourth good and perfect soil?* None of us can. Therefore this parable cuts through us all like the sharp blade of a plow, calling us to acknowledge our condition and repent.

The good news is that the Father sent forth His Word, Jesus, from heaven precisely to rescue you from what has infested you children of Adam, created from the dirt. Christ has cleared away the debris in your soil through the power of His suffering and death. Christ Jesus Himself is the seed that is cast, the seed that is sown; for He is the Word made flesh. Therefore, whatever the seed in the parable experienced—on the path, on the rock, in the thistles—Christ has experienced for you. Thorns were placed on the head of Christ, the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world. For you and for your deliverance Jesus was crucified in some hardened and rocky soil called Golgotha, the place of the skull. There, He bore the withering heat of the day and the fire of our judgment. There, people trampled on His Name with their insults, and Satan and his demons, like scavenging birds, hellishly pecked at Him and wounded Him and devoured Him. *Do you see?* All that happened to the seed in the first three instances happened to Jesus. And now, because Christ suffered all of that in your place,

the devil and the world, sin and death are conquered for you. Christ has destroyed the power of the raven and the hard clay, the thorn and the rock from the inside out. For on the third day our Lord broke through the soil, rising from the depths of the earth, bringing with Him mercy and new life for you.

The truth is that it is Christ Himself and Christ alone who is that fourth good soil. For only Christ is without the stain of sin; only He is not overcome by the devil or the world. He is the divine Word of the Father who was cast like seed from heaven into the good soil of His perfect humanity, which He assumed in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary. He alone is the One with the noble and good heart who received His Father's will and perfectly carried out His Father's Word, growing up and producing a bountiful harvest of those who believe and are saved.

Jesus once said of Himself, **“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.”** Our Lord Jesus is the promised Seed of Eve and Abraham and David. He was planted in the tomb in order that abundant life might spring up and that a great harvest might be brought in through His bodily resurrection. And you are a part of that crop. You are one in whom the Word of life has been planted. In Christ alone, by His grace alone, you become the fourth soil. The seed of the Word was planted in you by the Holy Spirit with the water of your baptism. It is sown still in the absolution and the proclamation of the Gospel. The seed of Christ will land on the soil once again today as the very body and blood of Christ are placed into your mouth, onto your tongue, for the forgiveness of your sins. The Word of Christ is at work in you now, that you may bear fruit one hundred fold—the fruit of faith toward God and fervent love toward one another. The Sower is still sowing His seed, that you may have His life forever.

Brothers and sisters of Christ, to you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Treasure these mysteries, dwell upon them, believe in them, so that you may remain deeply rooted in the Word of Christ, and so that you may share in Christ's resurrection in the final harvest on the Last Day. **“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”** Amen.