



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In seminary we took an entire class on the Parables of Jesus. It was a wonderful study that brought to life, what Jesus was teaching the disciples, people of His day, and even us today. And as we all know Jesus told many a parable. By some counts, Jesus gave us more than 30 parables in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Others suggest the total number of parables by Jesus totals more than 50. The number of distinct parables Jesus offers us is I think, less important than the message they bear. Jesus was teaching us all about the Kingdom of God.

In fact, it was the way that most Rabbis taught. It was the simplest way at that time, to make the people understand what they were talking about. However, today we have a hard time understanding the parables, not because they are difficult or complex, but just the opposite. Jesus' parables are simple and to the point. We get into trouble when to read more into them than was intended by Jesus. A New Testament scholar, Dr William Farmer once said, "A parable is a simple story, using concrete imagery, to make a single point."

That is a wonderful definition for us to remember: a simple story with concrete imagery that makes a simple point. As we think back to last week, we talked about most children's ability to look at a complex thing and cut to the chase, with a simple observation. Maybe we need to look at Jesus' parables through the eyes of a child. But once again as adults we think we have the knowledge to analyze the simplest story and make it into more than was intended. And Biblical scholars have been doing that for decades. They try to interpret the parables of Jesus as metaphors, similes, riddles, or paradigms. Yet, I think that if we look at a parable for what it is, a story about the Kingdom of God that uses concrete imagery we will be better served.

Today our Gospel text is the Parable of the Sower. People in Jesus' era would throw their seeds by hand to fall on the ground that was prepared for them. There was no special machinery to plant, they simply threw the seed to the ground. No straight rows, no furrows

to put seeds at the right depth, or so many inches apart. Their sowing was quite unsophisticated and unscientific. And seed was wasted.

It was true that seed that fell on hard ground could not take root. People would step on it, or birds would eat it before it had a chance to grow. Some other seeds got taken over by weeds. They did not have sprayers to put chemicals on the young plants to prevent them from getting choked by weeds or even fertilizer to lay down as the ground was prepared. It was a simpler time, and much seed was wasted for sure. We can guess that only a small percentage of seed that was sown by hand actually grew and bore fruit.

And folks this is like the Kingdom of God. Seed is sown and some gets eaten by birds, some gets chocked out by weeds, some young plants are withered from inadequate soil, but in spite of this all, some seed falls on good soil and brings forth grain. Actually, those seeds produced a hundredfold, some sixty and some thirty as our text tells us. The harvest was plentiful! And that is the true nature of the Kingdom of God. Yes, some seeds survive and grow to produce a plentiful harvest. God provides all those seeds need.

Today, we sow seeds by our actions and our words. Sometimes I wonder if it is worth it when I spend up to 6-8 hours preparing an 8-minute sermon. In my head I know that the average attention span of an adult is about 3-4 minutes. I wonder if my time is well spent, and I sometimes can get discouraged that no one is listening. Yet, I pray before each worship service with the assisting minister to let the Holy Spirit come to those in attendance, that He will let the words of my mouth be exactly what you need to hear each Sunday.

For you, I imagine that you might get discouraged when you invite your friend or neighbor to worship several times and they do not come. You know what they are missing by not being part of a worshipping community of believers, but it is hard to convey that message. We stop inviting because they don't come. What are those statistics, people need to be asked more than 10 times before they come to visit Christ the Servant. And we need, as shy quiet Lutherans, decades to ask even 5 people to join us in worship. So, we all need to ask Dr Carpenter his secret as he is about 100 years ahead of those stats.

What about parents? Do they feel discouraged that you bring your children to Sunday school and Confirmation classes only to have them never want to attend worship again after they make their affirmation of faith as young adults? As a parent I thought I might be better off talking to a wall than the kids about Jesus. But I never stop praying that they will come to know Jesus one day as I do. Maybe they need a few more grey hairs.

What about our giving to charity? We have made a practice of doing that here at CTS. We give 10% of our offering away to others that need it. But how often do we hear what they do with that money or how it makes a difference. About 8 years ago, I had a person from each local charity we gave to, come, and talk about how they use our money. Maybe we need to do that again and hear how we can make a difference.

So, what is the use of doing all these things if we cannot reap more benefit. When we look back to the percentages of how much wheat seed was scattered that never grew, we waste our time worrying about it. But what we need to do is to keep doing all the right things:

read the Bible, come to worship, pray, encourage others, give, and tell others about Jesus and what he had done for us. One of Rodney's favorite sayings is you have to keep throwing manure against the barn door before some of it will stick. Not sure why we want manure on the barn door, but I think that you get what he means. In the Kingdom of God, despite all the odds, God promises an abundant harvest.

We must remember that in ministry it is often times hard to see what you have accomplished, but one success is more than enough to outweigh many failed attempts. Whether you are inviting someone to join you for the men's group or women's quilting, or just trying your best to be more like Jesus your attempts are worth the trouble. The seeds that you sow are not always guaranteed to grow right away but can in some later time come to bear fruit. In fact, Rodney mentioned that they had a snippet on the news about some wheat growing, that had been in an Egyptian burial site for a thousand years. Well, they have debunked that myth of Mummy Wheat several times, but guess what folks, God can make anything grow. He is not only the great physician, but the great gardener as well. It is up to the Holy Spirit when the seeds we plant in others will grow.

As you all know, I am a huge baseball fan. Well, in baseball you are a true hero, a super star and can command huge amounts of money if you can hit the ball 30% of the time. Folks, that is 3 out of 10 times you are at bat, you get a hit. Sounds like a failure to me, doesn't it. The highest batting average on the Brewers is Christian Yelich at .284, that is not even three out of ten. Or if you can, as a pitcher have an earned run average under 3.0 you are a super star. And if you could do both, your name might be Shohei Ohtani who is a rare exception to the world of baseball.

So, know you are not alone in spreading seed that does not grow every kernel. God may use only one out of your thousand to change the life of another or the course of the world. How many wanna-be opera singers do you think Pavarotti's voice teacher coached? How many mirror ball trophies are given out each season to the two dozen participants that practice 50-60 hours per week? How many cards have you sent or email's that go unanswered. Few, perhaps, are cherished for a lifetime. How many acorns does an oak tree shed each year, where only a handful become trees and the rest are eaten by squirrels.

I think you get the idea. Examples of spreading seeds are endless. In the Christian faith, we see that thousands of people heard and saw Jesus in person, but only a handful came to believe that he was the Messiah, the Son of God. In the Gospel of Luke, we read the Pentecost story where 3,000 Jews from all over the Mediterranean came to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior, yet we never hear of any of them again. And so, it is with the 2000 years since Jesus walked the earth. Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children have read the Bible. Some have gone deeper to read commentaries, or to go to Bible studies or even go to seminary, yet what do we remember or retain. I do admit that I have a really bad memory. I somehow was at the end of the line when it came to dishing out memory cells, but even though I cannot always find the right scripture verse to back up my thought, I know how to find it, or I just simply know that I believe it.

Jesus told this parable to a crowd of Jews gathered at the Sea of Galilee. Our writer tells us that there were so many people that Jesus had to go out in a boat so he could be heard. We are not given a number of how many people were there, but I suppose we could assume

that there were quite a few. And some of them probably even listened, were paying attention enough to get the point. But truth be told, most of those present soon went home and back to their old lives unchanged. And others went away changed and touched in a way that they were never the same again. Those folks are the ones who became part of the group that followed Jesus all the way to the cross. And it is through these folks that were faithful witnesses of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that the message about the Kingdom of God was carried from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

I urge you to always have plenty of seed in your pocket or purse and be looking for a place to throw it. Yes, some will fall on hard ground, some will be cast among the thorns and others will be choked to death. But keep casting out your seed because there is enough good earth out there that some will yield fruit. You see, it is our job to throw the seed, but we are not responsible for the results. It is God that in His mercy and grace, will see that some of it lands on good earth. Our job is to cast our seeds of hope and encouragement and redemption in Jesus' name. Then, Lord, give us the patience and faith to leave the results up to you. AMEN