

Proper 10 A
Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23
July 16th, 2017
St. George's Bolton
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New Growth

"But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Be fruitful and multiply we are told in Genesis. How do we become so fruitful, do you suppose, and what are the "fruits of our labors"?

Jesus describes various conditions for growing seed. Some are very obviously better than others. God gives the growth, so there is no guarantee that the seed will grow and be fruitful, however, we can tend our own garden and pray that it will yield the right results.

What does the word fertile mean to you? To me it means that we have found a good place to plant our seeds and have good soil, good conditions in which to grow the seed that is planted. You select a place that will have plenty of sunlight. No one plants a serious garden at the base of the north side of their home, that is, unless it is a shade-plant garden. This means preparing the soil, mixing in nutrients and fertilizer to make it rich. This begins the previous fall when a garden is cleared and mulched. You really don't prepare it over-night. Then the seed is placed in the rich garden bed, and carefully covered up. Next the soil is watered. Next comes waiting, waiting for the seed to sprout and grow. If you have done your preparations

right, this should not take long. Next you weed your garden to be sure invasive weeds and plants do not choke out the seedlings you want to grow. And finally, you may build a fence to protect your plants from invading varmints who are eager to eat fruits of your labors or destroy the young plants, for their leaves. This includes insects, which you can either control with poisons, or better yet with organic solutions, which will protect the young seedlings from attack.

Speak of fertility and good soil. This metaphor is ripe for the spiritual life, and so, Jesus uses these images to talk about how the seeds grow. In his figure, all the seed is good. What is the seed he is spreading? Simply, *The Word of God*. Some of it falls on deaf ears. Still more of it is readily received, however soon forgotten and not acted upon. It has no chance to grow at all, and so what was broadcast, dies. Still other seed is received and is enthusiastically acted upon, but the action is like an infatuation and lacks staying power and soon falls away, withering and dying before it has a chance to be fruitful and multiply. Then there is the seed which falls on fertile ground. Are you grounded and prepared enough to allow this seed to grow in you?

Fertile soil is ripe for change. It is well prepared. It is ready for seed planting and readily allows the small capsules of new life to grow within. Being ripe for change means you are sensing that there is something more to this life than the way you have been living. This sense can come from boredom with the way you have been living. It can come from being burned out at work. The yearning can come from a recognition that your life has become passionless, not doing either what makes you happy or what makes you feel fulfilled. Your spiritual garden is ripe for being plowed under to make way for a new, fresh start. It is interesting that the motto of our home state is, "*He who*

transplants, sustains.”]Indeed, when we transplant the good growth into a fresh environment, into good soil, it has a chance to blossom and be fruitful.

Change can be a process we embrace over time or it can happen very quickly, sometimes beyond our control. Even then, it is best to embrace change like a *process*, just as it takes patience for the gardeners to wait for their seedlings to grow. Patience.

What is the most important change? What is the most important transformation, ahead of all others? It is the spiritual one. You can move to a new location to restart your life, or choose a new life partner, or you can start a new job, however, if you do not address the soil and conditions of your soul, it will all likely be for naught. Tend to the soul first, and the rest will become apparent. Just merely changing out the externals will likely not produce the change you desire. We tend to carry about the problems in our lives that made us unhappy before, and simply replay the tapes from the past, leaving us as depressed and unhappy, unless we make the fundamental changes that lie underneath in our psyche and our spirits. You buy a new car and you may be happy for quite a while, and then the newness wears off or thin and it becomes just like the old one you drove before. You get a new home in a new neighborhood, and surprise, you still find it hard to make friends with your neighbors. Maybe the problem isn't them, it's you. And so on, with new jobs and new spouses. If you don't address the poor soil, lack of fertilization, weeds and pests and conditions in your soul, any external changes will all be for naught. The real change must come from within.

Change is fearsome. It implies we are moving to new, unknown territory. It implies taking a risk. Faith is the God given grace

that allows us to take the risk which faith invites us to take. The change here is to the unknown, yes, but also well known. We know where we are headed. We feel the invitation and it innately, intuitively, we know it is right for us.

We must prepare ourselves for this change to receive the seed in a way that it can take root in our hearts. While changing externals can certainly help, it's what is inside that really counts.

- The first step is to empty and plow under the old soil in our souls. If you are a gardener, it is like sifting through the garden soil to remove old roots and rocks. This emptying can range from sifting out and removing our anxieties to seeking the forgiveness we need to cleanse our soiled souls. Most importantly it is about rooting out habitual ways of behaving into which we slide when the going gets tough. Plow those habits under, whether it is indulging in desires or taking up space on the couch.
- Fertilize the soil with the words of scripture, which contain the seeds for new life. Embrace other spiritual reading that fertilizes your mind and heart and invites you to move forward and go with the new growth that is taking place in you.
- Water that soil in your soul with prayer, quiet and meditation. It is vital to keep the soul hydrated. Drink deeply of the cup of Christ's life giving blood.
- Light up your soul by being open to God's presence in both the grand and the simple places of life. Be present to God as God is present to you. Allow God to light up the way on your path ahead. Go where God leads you. Trust in God. Have faith.
- Prune off the withered branches that are slowing your growth and dragging you down. What do you think those

might be? Have you noticed them? Do you keep sustaining this deadwood, even though you know it is dragging you down?

- Pluck out the weeds of old habits and ways, which choke the new growth of the seed implanted in you.
- Enjoy the fruits of your labors and find peace for your soul and happiness because you have discovered and are living your passion. What are you passionate about? What is your passion?

The simple truth is, good seed planted in good soil will grow. Good soil upon which God broadcasts his Word is the soul who hears the seed and knows its import and understands the call to ministry and to live a passionate life, and then is fruitful.

God loves you. If you are doing what you love, you will be very fruitful in the end. AMEN