

Sermon Sexagesima 2020

February 16, 2020

Luke 8:4-15

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson from Luke, the Parable of the Sower.

You don't have to be a product of a first century agrarian society to be able to picture what Jesus is talking about in the parable, do you? If you close your eyes, you can see each of the soils and the plants that come forth without too much trouble. There's the soil on the path, and someone steps on the seed, the bird then comes and eats it. Then the rocky soil like a gravel driveway, too dry to sustain real growth. The hot sun withers it up. Then the thorny soil. Sure the seed starts to grow, but if you've ever gardened and left the garden unattended for too long, you know how quickly weeds grow in comparison to the things we want to grow, and then it gets choked out. And then the plants. We can see those if we just drive down the highway. Growing up in Indiana, I always remember hearing the mantra of the corn: knee high by the fourth of July. There's the plant that grows and it produces the product for which it's intended. It's fruitful.

I'm guessing you can also visualize the spiritual corollaries. There's the soil where the seed lands, but it's snatched away. Luther describes this as someone who has the Word, who hears it, maybe even thinks that they partake of it, but it's not really there. I think for example of how I've heard Presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg use biblical passages to defend abortion up unto the breath of a child. The kernel of the word may be there, but its heart has been snatched away.

Then there are those who hear the word with joy, but then fall away in trials. I'm reminded there of people I've known who heard the Gospel, were so excited for its joy, but later decided it was not true. For example, I knew a guy in college who fit this. He was involved with Navigators pretty regularly, but eventually, I guess decided that he couldn't reconcile the idea that God's grace was so deep that even Hitler could be in heaven had he repented. Of course, there's a sense in which this could apply a little more directly to something like persecution as the trial, and then giving in in those circumstances, but we can see the connection in both.

Then there are those who hear the Word but who cling too much to the worries and the pleasures of this life. There are so many this happens to. This is probably even the one we have to watch in ourselves. This is the child who grows up in the faith, but then goes to college and indulges in the hedonism there, finally deciding the burden on his

conscience is better served by adopting a philosophy that changes who God is rather than repenting. It's the adult who chases the paycheck rather than the faith. It's the mother who allows herself to be overwhelmed by worry for her child and despairs of God's ability to protect that child, or His goodness should that protection not reflect the care she expects.

Of course, as I describe these, I would hope we can also see ourselves a bit in each of them. There are always those times a portion of the word and its understanding are snatched from us. Thankfully by God's grace, not so that we aren't saved, but that understanding flees. There are always those times that we experience trial and doubt comes into our brain. And there are the times when the world and its thorns rise up around us and threaten to choke out that faith altogether.

And in the midst of that it becomes tempting to say "so be that soil that bears fruit." In fact, I'm pretty sure I heard that when I was en route to becoming Lutheran. "You need to purify yourself, you need to till the soil of your life so that the Word will have the ability to grow up in your heart." The understanding was that as Jesus says that this good soil **"are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience,"** my job was to purify my heart so that it would be good and honest. My job was to work extra hard to be extra good so that God would be able to do that.

Now as I say that, should I sin? No. Should I make every effort to live in a God pleasing way, living according to the Ten Commandments? Of course. But can I purify my own heart? I can't. God does it. In fact, a couple of weeks ago I mentioned reading a book about being a pastor, and I was reading that again this week when I so appreciated the author reminding me that our sanctification—that is our being made holy—is God's work. You see what we often do is to connect the fact that the Bible calls us as Christians to do good works, then if we're not doing enough, we say we're not sanctifying ourselves enough, we're not making ourselves holy enough. But what the book said to me so well was the reminder that God does this. He makes me holy. His Holy Spirit makes me holy.

In fact, as we're looking at this parable about the Word of God, it's great to make that point again. How does God give His holiness to you? He bespeaks you righteous by His strong Word, as we say in the hymn. His Word gives it to you. He gives it to you with that Word in baptism. He gives you that holiness with the Word in the Lord's Supper. He makes you holy that you would be holy in the blood of Jesus given to you in those things.

In fact, if you think about this in connection to the soil, you have to take a step back and realize that this soil never can till itself. The soil can never clear itself. As my wife always likes to say, "nature fills a void." For the soil to be cleared for the seed to grow,

someone has to clear it. God has to clear the soil of our hearts. And He'll do this in our tribulations. It's like I said last week that these trials we know happen so that we wouldn't cling to the idols of this life. But tribulations alone only clear the soil, the Word is the seed that grows.

And that Word comes and God speaks His Law in that Word. That hurts. When that Word, that Law reminds you of just how sinful you are, that doesn't feel good. It pokes at your conscience. When that Law says how this world isn't going to fulfill our expectations of happy life, that disappoints us because we want it to be easy. But what that Word is doing then is feeding the heart of that seed, the Gospel. It's getting things ready that we can hear the joy, then of what Jesus did. You see when Jesus then died for sin, He rose to show the promise of His eternity where this will all be better. And what a blessing we have in that. We have the joy of that Word we heard spoken to Paul in the Epistle Lesson: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." And we talked about that Grace last week. That grace which God gives you which is grounded in His eternal love for you, and earned in the work of Jesus for you.

But as we say this, then we can look at this week's lesson and understand something else. You see what Jesus did on the cross was two thousand years ago in a place 6,000 miles away. So how does that do any good for you? Is it something where now there's just this idea in God's brain that He's going to look at you differently? Well, we're sort of prone to think that. But in Scripture we see that God delivers that grace to us. He gives it to us like a gift. And how does He deliver it? By His Word.

In view of that, I'm going to shift a bit. I'm going to shift because the fact that God gives this to us in His Word means something. It means that all we need is that Word. We like to think that this needs to be dressed up, it needs to be added to, it needs to be more appealing, but that's all we need: this Word that Jesus has died for our sins.

Now I say that because of how people hear in our day. I was listening to a presentation online about public speaking, and the presenter said that in public speaking the speaker should tell stories. Why? He said because a story makes an emotional connection to the hearer, and the emotional connection makes the presentation more memorable. And this made me wonder something. I wonder if people have always had this experience, or if this is a result of when we live. What do I mean?

Well if you were in Bible Class Sunday, you were there when we talked about Judaism and the Enlightenment. I've mentioned this briefly before, but if you know about the Enlightenment, about even the era often called the era of Modernism, you maybe know that it was very rationalistic. Everything was pared down to be figured out by our

reason. You wanted to know the truth? You could figure it out with logic. Well in the era after that, the era of Post-Modernism, there was a reaction. Now everything is true because of emotion. Do you want it to be true? It is if you feel it. And this is true even for many Christians. How do you know God is in a Church? You can feel Him there. How do you know what God wants you to do? You can feel it.

But Christians, there's doubt in both of these. How do you know this really is God? How do you know either your logical conclusion or your feeling is what you should come up with according to what God desires, or says, or calls you to? You don't. In fact I'm reminded of a book we read in seminary. It was a book called "The Quest for Holiness." I really appreciated that book because of how it started. It said we as sinners try to ascend to God, we try to get to heaven in at least one of three ways: works, reason, or emotion. We either try to work our way there, reason our way there, or feel our way through an emotional connection to God.

Christians, this all depends on what we do. What a blessing we have in the Word. You don't have to look to yourself. You don't have to look at your works, you don't have to look at your understanding, you don't have to look at how you feel. All of those things will never be enough. All of those things will leave you unsure. Look at how things are in hard times. You feel like you're working, and God's not giving as much as you'd like. Or you're trying to understand with all your might, and God still doesn't make sense. Or you want to feel something with regard to God, and you don't feel happy, or comforted, or trusting.

But hear the Word: "**My Grace is sufficient for you.**" Hear that promise: "**My Word will not return void.**" You're here with that Word. It's working on you. It's forgiving you. It did what it says in baptism, having washed you and made you Jesus' own. It brings you Jesus body and blood now, forgiving your sins, and promising Jesus is here with you. Just like rain falls and we can see plants come up from the ground, the Word is going to work in you. In fact, it will bear that fruit Jesus talks about. So you don't have to worry about making sure you're that right kind of soil. No, the Word will do it, our Lord will prepare you. Keep hearing the Word, keep coming to church, keep reading the Scriptures. That Word will do it. And it will do it in ways that you won't even recognize. But that's the promise of the Word, the promise of God's grace, and that is always sufficient for you. Amen.