

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23  
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost  
July 15, 2023

How do you listen to a sermon? Maybe you are the type that takes a glance at your watch to figure out when it will be over. Some churchgoers are good at identifying just who needed to hear that particular portion of the Word. They may even congratulate the preacher on the way out, “You really told ‘em today,” or think, “I wish so-and-so had been here to hear that.” With this portion of Matthew, it is easy to do just that. We hear about different types of soil and think about who fits each one. Such way of listening does us little good. We need to see its personal message for us, to realize that our Savior is talking to me in these verses. Jesus aimed at that view when he said, “He who has ears, let him hear.” So let’s look for how we show up in all four types of soil as

#### GOD SOWS HIS SEED IN YOU

- I. Don’t waste it
- II. Produce a harvest

The Savior’s concern for people stood out as he taught this crowd of people even though it had already been a long day. He taught them by means of parables, those stories he told that used earthly situations to picture spiritual truths. Some Bible students think this was the first parable he shared.

Agriculture was prominent in Palestine and this parable told of a man sowing seed. It was broadcast by hand, not with the big rigs we see in fields today. Even so, some seed fell on a path. People walked through the countryside and a path for them went alongside a field or sometimes, even through the middle of the field, as travelers followed the shortest route. With all the traffic the route soon became packed hard. So the seed just sat there on the surface. Plenty of alert birds would swoop down for a snack. No harvest from that seed.

With that scene Jesus depicted a spiritual situation about the hearing of his Word. In this case the Word was presented. Plenty of people don’t hear the Word anymore and we have concern for them, but the ones Jesus described here did have contact with it. However, it had no impact on them, made no effect on their life. They went on as if nothing happened. “I’m a path,” they seemed to think. “The seed isn’t for me.” There were such hardhearted people at the time of Jesus. You can see some in the previous chapter, opponents who claimed he had power to drive out demons because he was linked up with Beelzebub, the prince of demons.

These kind of people still exist. They claim the Word does not have a message for us today. It doesn’t make sense; it’s not true. We don’t have to listen. But wait—

it's not those others we were going to talk about. This path also pictures us. Sometimes we could be physically present where the Word is heard; we're just not paying attention. It bounces off us like seeds splattering over a hard path. Or we come up with excuses why we don't need to follow its message. "I know what it says, but..." Every time we find personal exceptions, watch out. The Word gets no results. Satan is watching to make the most of our rejection.

Other seed fell on rocky places. Jesus wasn't describing Wisconsin soil where rocks seem to sprout constantly and have to be picked every spring. It was a thin layer of soil over rock. The rock absorbed warmth of the sun so the seed that fell there sprouted quickly. That same sun dried up the tender sprouts. They could not send roots into the rock to obtain moisture so they soon withered. The plants died. No harvest.

That kind of hearer reacts with initial excitement. They accept the Savior with enthusiasm. We're almost ashamed or embarrassed as we look at such feeling compared with our own behavior. However, faith needs roots and they are lacking. Listen to Jesus' sad comment, "Since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away." The troubles were meant to strengthen the person's faith. But they can't handle them. "This isn't what I expected. You mean I will have to suffer for my faith? It's not a life of good times and pleasures?" They fall away, dejected and deflated. Again, no harvest.

Not us, we protest! We're not so superficial and temporary in our faith. Oh yeah? Have we never had something knock our feet out from under us? Who hasn't had problems you couldn't handle, times you were dejected and ready to give up?

Then there was the seed among thorns. When the field was plowed, the roots of the thorns were stronger than the grain sprouts. The smaller plants were choked out. Most of us can recognize the situation, whether we have a farm or a garden. How easily the weeds can take over!

Jesus identified this kind of hearer: "The worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful." Worries are a problem. All of us have them, about various and varying matters. We may worry about health problems, finances, job, family, popularity, our boyfriend or girlfriend. Or sometimes it is the activities of our lives that receive all the attention and crowd out faith. The more we focus on them, the more our spiritual life loses out. A special rival which Jesus named was wealth. It can deceive you whether you have much of it or not. Elsewhere our Savior warned that we cannot serve two masters. Wealth promises great things but it cannot deliver on those promises. Other interests often

predominate in our lives. When we say we can't get to church or can't study the Word because...(whatever), watch out! Weeds are growing. Our faith is threatened. The process is a gradual one. It's just like the garden when we don't get at it. The reasons seem legitimate and important. I'm busy today; then it's rainy, or too hot. I'll get to it another day. All of a sudden we look out and the plot is overrun. "How did it happen?" we wonder. The same can and does happen spiritually.

To all of us then this parable of our Lord calls out, "Repent!" And be on guard. Don't ignore the Word of the Lord, don't crowd it out of your heart, don't look at it superficially. Don't waste what God has sown.

## II.

Rather, use the seed of the Word as God wants. Grow in it and produce a harvest. That's what happened with the seed that landed on the target area, on the good soil. "Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." The seed sprouted, took root, grew, matured and produced a crop. The amounts of the harvest varied as it does in farming, but there was a return on the investment of seed and labor. That, of course, is the purpose of planting. The farmer wants to maximize this last type of soil and the return from it.

So what is the spiritual message which Jesus imparted? Lest we draw some false conclusions, remember that there is no naturally good soil when it comes to human hearts. We are all by nature lost in sin, unproductive, opposed to God, producing just the opposite of what he wants. Our hearts are filled with evil as we enter this world. So nobody can develop a big head when a crop is produced. It's all God's work.

"The message of the kingdom" is the good news of salvation in Jesus. By it his rule in hearts is established. It is premium seed, carefully developed, packaged and ready to plant, just like seed companies put lots of research into developing hybrid seed. Farmers also do much work in preparation for planting. I realize the practices of agriculture are much different than when I was growing up with plowing, discing, harrowing and planting, then cultivating a time or two—now it's mostly no-till preparation and spraying with giant equipment, but there is still time, expense and labor involved. The Lord made some marvelous and costly preparations for the harvest he seeks. It starts with that excellent seed, his Word, the message of the gospel. God sent his own Son into the world in human form to live and to die in our place. Jesus was the world's substitute as he lived the perfect life to fulfill the Law of God, then died on the cross bearing the sins of us all. He endured the pains of hell which we had deserved. He paid the price for every sin ever committed. He rose again in victory, demonstrating that our forgiveness is

complete. He lives and we also will live eternally. That's the great news, the life-changing, eternity-changing message which is the seed he sows in our hearts.

Cultivation efforts are involved also. God's law confronts us with our sins and shows our need for a Savior. He plows up the weeds of worldly cares, love of riches, selfishness and self-righteousness which fill our hearts. Then he sends his Spirit into our hearts through the gospel message, breaking open the hard bedrock of enmity against God and planting faith. The Spirit leads us to trust Jesus as our Savior. Like crop production, the work isn't finished at planting time. God continues to feed our faith through his gospel in Word and sacrament, bringing growth, causing our roots to sink deeply into his Word. He develops a mature faith, strengthening us to withstand the storms and stresses of life and remain in faith.

Then there comes a harvest. By his power we produce fruits of faith, actions and attitudes that accord with his will. We offer lives of service to God and to the other people he has placed around us in this world. We seek to do everything to his glory.

That's what God is doing in you. He has planted the Word in your heart. Now you're in the growing process. That's why we encourage coming to God's house for worship and Bible study, both as a group and privately. It fertilizes our faith, which matures as we go to that Word in our life experiences, including troubles. As we sink our roots deeper into the Word, we will not fall but will continue to grow and develop. We will pull out the distractions that threaten our faith. We make God the top priority in our lives.

Yes, in spite of the challenges and dangers all around, it does happen—the Lord receives a harvest. Do you recall today's First Lesson? God's Word will not fail to accomplish his purposes. It gets results. Those results are happening in you and through you. So study his Word, take it to heart, realize it is speaking to you. Repent of your sins, indifference, shallowness, worldly cares and worries. Receive the good news of Christ's forgiveness for all your sins. Take in the gospel and grow in faith, producing a harvest in your life.

“To the Word!” That must be our motto. Jesus said, “He who has ears, let him hear.” The Word continues to be sown in you. Don't waste the Lord's efforts. Produce a harvest as you follow and serve your Savior.