

Sermon for Proper 10A

The Text: Matthew 13:1-23

It must have been a spectacular sight to see Jesus teaching such large crowds. Picture Jesus there in the boat telling parables, and the people spread along the bank of the lake, sitting in a natural amphitheatre, right down to the water's edge, all with a view of Jesus, as they sat and listened to his teaching.

However, since Jesus taught in parables it made it difficult to know what he was really saying hidden within the contents of the simple story about a farmer casting seed for planting.

Some would not have understood what Jesus was saying. I imagine some having heard the parable would have immediately misheard what he said. Perhaps their minds were so preoccupied with their own busyness; anything Jesus said was quickly enveloped by their own thoughts. So, while they thought they were hearing what Jesus said, and were agreeing with him, they really only heard the thoughts of their own hearts. They had turned Jesus' word into a justification for their own ideas; forgetting what he really said, they were led away on a trail of their own misunderstanding. These are they in the parable who are the seed sown along the path.

Then some would have heard what Jesus was saying, and would have become very excited by what was heard. They would have been empowered and filled with passion; convinced that they were going to leave that place as disciples for Jesus. Nothing was going to hinder their new life, now that they had heard his powerful word. Although they left the lake having never felt better, their joy and passion is short-lived.

The very word they heard and believed that would make everything "all good", brought them opposition and persecution from others. Then they began to doubt their feelings, that perhaps this word was not the cure-all they expected. They had no answers for the difficult questions of life; the questions of suffering, the questions of hardship, the questions of pain, and the other things that didn't quite add up as they lived their new lives in the Word.

So rather than enduring the persecution and opposition, from within their own hearts and from outside, their emotions led them away from the powerful Word of Christ. One day they were doing it for Jesus, the next they were doing it tough. They climbed to a religious high but fell into a religious depression. These are they in the parable who received the seed that fell along rocky places.

Others who heard Jesus' word didn't give it any thought because they were too concerned with other things. Their minds suffocating in a sea of churning worries; will it rain, what will I eat, what will I wear, will someone take my possessions, how do I make more money and become successful?

Or even if it is not the worries of material things, they got so churned up on how they might do the right thing to be accepted by the preacher who sat out in the boat, that they just gave up. So overwhelmed by the mountain of work they expect of themselves they just give up and are swallowed by their own existence. These are they in the parable who received the seed that fell among the thorns.

The seed also fell on good soil and yielded a crop one hundred, sixty, and thirty times what was planted. Those who heard his word veiled in the parable, and understood it, are these people. These people are the stalks of grain that stand up in the seed, firmly rooted in the Word of God. There is no doubt that we all want to be the good seed planted in good soil, none of us want to die like the seed that fell on the path, the rocky ground, or amongst the thorns.

So, which seed, and soil combination are you? Are you the seed on the hard path? Does the Word of God have trouble penetrating your hard exterior? Do you have trouble hearing and understanding it?

Are you the seed on rocky ground? Are you passionate for Jesus when your emotions are whipped up, but floundering in the everyday hardships of life? Do you only want to hear the feel-good things and not the stuff that stirs and confronts the truth of your sinful inner being?

Or are you the seed amongst the thorns? Is your hearing of God's Word constantly choked out by your necessity to be successful, wealthy, and healthy? What is more important to you: God or your job or your income? God or your car? God or your family? God or your property? Is it easier to miss church, to overlook God, than to miss something else?

Then again some of you might find that you are a combination of seed on hard, rocky, and thorny places. You see yourself struggling with a mixture or all of these things.

Regardless of whatever the combination, we all yearn to be the seed and the soil that produces more. We all want to be healthier soil, to have better understanding, endurance, and persistence in God's Word. Just like the crowds that sat and listen to Jesus by the lake, we too sit and hear his Word here today.

People of God, who struggle with the hardness, rockiness, and thorniness of the heart, the secret of this parable is simple. We are called by Jesus with one phrase, "*Whoever has ears, let them hear.*" (Matthew 13:9)

This verse ends the first part of the Gospel we heard today, but then a piece was skipped to hear the explanation of the parable. It's in this middle section we find some answers that flow into Jesus' explanation of the parable.

10 The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" 11 He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12 Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

13 This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. 14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. 15 For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them."

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 17 For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it. (Matthew 13:10-17NIV)

It is important for us to know that the disciples came and questioned Jesus about speaking in parables. Jesus says that the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given to them but he also goes on to explain the parable. This tells us that Jesus knew that much of what he had said had even gone over the disciples' heads. They too were hard ground, rocky ground, and thorny ground.

So if we and the disciples are hard or rocky or thorny ground, and we desire to be the good soil on which the seed falls, we can ask ourselves how a farmer might prepare unsuitable soil for a bountiful harvest. And we are returned to Jesus' words, *"Whoever has ears, let them hear."*

A farmer ploughs his paddock, he works the good soil, and he receives a good harvest. This soil if left uncultivated will become thorny and hard over time. And stony ground cleared of its rocks can leave rich organic soil. And similarly with us we too need to be cultivated and worked by God into the soil he desires for a rich harvest. God does this with his Word, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the mystery of the Gospel spoken and proclaimed, entering the ear, and working the heart of the hearer.

The disciples returned and received an explanation of the parable, and therefore allowed themselves to be cultivated by God over and over again, removing their hardness, their rocks, and their thorns, so that through them God continues to gather his harvest even today.

Because you want to endure in Christ, because you want peace in the presence of God, and because you value your salvation more than your earthly life, hear the Word of the Lord! Return, repent, receive! Let the Word of the Lord enter your ear and cultivate your heart. God desires to make you a part of his bountiful harvest.

Jesus says, *"Whoever has ears, let them hear."* Amen.