

## **Pentecost 6 Matt 13 “God’s Word Accomplishes” July 12 2020**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

Today we hear the parable of the Sower and the Seed. What is going on with this? Did not Jesus last week just try to give us rest, now we must become good dirt!? How do we do that even if we are able to? More importantly, how much work is this going to involve, and even more importantly, how much money?

Wait a minute, maybe this parable is not all about us after all. Perhaps it is Jesus looking with mercy on our frustration and our concerns and letting us rest in Him. The miracle of God’s word is that it usually works in a most gentle and resistible way. God loves our “yes” to him, so He preserves our ability to say “no.” People regularly exercise that “no” option. But it does not mean that the kingdom has failed, or that the Word is defective.

The parable of the Sower is about the fact that Jesus ministry doesn’t seem to be very successful at times. In Jesus own time many people turned away from Him. Paul got kicked out of many of the towns in which he preached. This parable is a partial answer to the question of why this is. Why, if God is omnipotent, and if His Word never returns void, do not all people respond, why are we all not “good soil?”

Of course, we can only be “good soil” if God enables us to understand the Word and to believe and trust in the mysteries of God revealed by that Word. If the Word is received in faith, then that person, whether in Jesus day or now, should not expect to be successful in the ways that fallen human nature considers as successful. I mean really? Look at Jesus! How many people would consider being despised, accused of a crime, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death to be “successful?” When the Word of God is proclaimed, it will not always “work” in the ways we expect it to. It may bring new believers. It may bring opposition. Both of those are examples of the Word working. Let me give you a couple of Bible references to chew on:

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Matthew 3:12 Jesus' winnowing fork is in his hand, and He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

To those whom God has enabled to understand His Word (that the Holy Spirit has called by the Gospel and enlightened with His gifts) and that have believed and trusted in the promises of His word (that is, have been sanctified and kept in the true faith) should have a fruitful yield. This may not be in the immediate and expected way. The fruit of some plants may be oxygen or shade. We seem to think that every plant bears apples or oranges...or maybe chocolate. To the good soil the seed will produce the marvelous revelation of the generosity of God's salvation and of His lavish sowing.

**We** are not responsible for the faith or the belief of anyone. The **Word** accomplishes that. Our "job" is simply to cast. And notice that this strange farmer sows in all sorts of crazy places. He does not seem to have a care about how where it goes; He just sows.

We should go and do likewise. We do not make the seed grow, we do not send the rain, we do not cause it to fruit and ripen. We just throw it out there. Work enough, but the heavy lifting is done by God.

Now, I do not have the answers why many churches are failing in North America today. If I knew the answer, I probably could make a pile of money off it. But I do not know. It is a mystery to me too. I do know that Jesus still cares for the Church and He continues to send out his disciples as missionaries into our world. It is His Church and He can work good through those little and shrinking places. What is more, He has things in mind which I cannot imagine. That means that we cannot think **we** are the Church's Savior. **God** must be that one. That is good news for me and you, and it is humbling. It relieves us of a burden, but it also means that God may see something that we do not, and He may not do what we want with it.

The nature of God's work in this world is such that He chooses not to work irresistibly. To do so would violate the nature of His love and the Gospel itself. Irresistible grace is no grace at all. God creates us to be freely acting human beings. Thus, He does not ordinarily force the soil. The nature of the proclamation of the kingdom is that it can be resisted and frequently is.

The fact that the Word does work is proof of its power to work faith. The seed sown on the rocky soil has the same potential or power as the seed on the good soil. Jesus gives us no indication that He is targeting one kind of soil or another. He is sowing. It might seem like lousy farming, but it seems to be a description of the Kingdom of God.

You see, we cannot always tell when the soil is good soil. That mystery seems to belong to God alone. Whenever we try to guess who is likely good soil, we are usually wrong. Was murderous Saul rocky soil or good soil? Is the tattooed fellow with piercings rocky soil or good soil? Is the young family who walks into church with nice clothes better soil?

We tend to return to the plots of land which have borne fruit in the past. We should remember that the fruiting which Jesus describes is miraculous. We are to be about the business of sowing, recklessly.

I have often heard this parable expounded as an exhortation to be good dirt. But what I have not heard is any help on how to be that good dirt. As a gardener, I know that good soil is filled with dead and rotten things. I suppose that is the key. Jesus came to raise dead people and bring the rotten to repentance. And we admit to our spiritual death and receive the Word of Life. This parable is a description, not a prescription. It is describing something that happens, not saying that we can make it happen by our own power. Jesus is describing God's work.

The Word of God is sown, rather carelessly, for it is thrown everywhere, even places no sane farmer would sow seed. This is a lavish sower of seed. That seed, strewn everywhere, now does its job, regardless of the soil upon which it is sown.

Sometimes it simply becomes food for the birds. Other places it tries to grow but either gets choked out or burnt out, but it in some way has accomplished God's purpose. But in other places it sprouts, takes root, and bears marvelous, even miraculous fruit.

So it is with the ministry of God's Word in the world today. Sometimes it bears marvelous fruit, other times it seems not. Sometimes it gets picked up and sown in places other than where we spread it, as though a bird had taken it. We grieve to see the troubles of the world choke it out of the hearts of a friend. We mourn to see it burnt out by hardship in the life of another. But we marvel to see it bear fruit in some mighty strange places. It is out doing its good work, miraculously, sometimes invisibly, and often in ways we don't understand. But God's Word still works.

Jesus' Word is efficacious. This is not just the Bible, but the Word made flesh who dwells in us, the Word which through water and the Spirit is in our hearts and on our lips and which has transformed our lives into living invitations. While it remains His Word and He does with it what he sees fit, **we** carry the cure which this world needs: God's Word to save.

He calls us to faithful repentance and witness. But He will take care of the success. There is no burden laid upon our shoulders.

Jesus did not look like much of a success when He hung on the cross. He in fact looked a great deal like a failure. He calls us to take up a cross and follow him. Should we really expect to be successful in the terms of the world? You know, we call that Friday on which Jesus died, "Good," and we gather to hear that story every year. The appearance of our failure in worldly terms is not necessarily failure in God's eyes. Remember He rejoices over one sinner who repents. That is an amazing miracle.

But we are "transactionally" wired. We have a built-in tendency to ask questions about Return On Investment. If we are going to sow all this seed, we want to see some return on that, and a dying, shrinking church is not it. But against such a despairing thought, God speaks a parable. The sower simply sows, the seed does its job, and sometimes it clearly works, but other times we don't perceive it.

But God has said his Word does not return empty. Isaiah 55:10-11.

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven  
and do not return there but water the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
<sup>11</sup> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

He doesn't always give us the results which we want or expect. Sometimes the growth is a deepening of faith in people, but not greater numbers. Sometimes God is delighting in the one sinner who repents while we, and many times the treasurer, are counting heads. But the congregation which focuses on the visible fruit of the Word, and loses sight of the actual sowing mandate, will find itself tied up in knots about the things which properly belong to God. Be a sower, let God carry that conversion and fruit bearing burden.

We have a mighty God. Mighty to save. Mighty to love. And in Him we always have hope. Hope and trust in the miracle-working God, not in our music program, not in my prowess as a preacher, not in our preschool, not in our assimilation or new member welcoming efforts. It is always God, our miracle working God, who through Jesus Christ conquered death on the Cross and raised Him from the dead that we might have new life in Him. What better way to form good soil than that?

May the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen!