

Pentecost 9 2008 [PR 10]
Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23

I'm sure you have heard many sermons on this text. It is one of those lessons that can be used as a stick to beat people up. The sermon could end with the preacher asking in a quavering voice "And what kind of soil are you?" It is a personal, probing question that makes us squirm. We know we are not always faithful disciples. We know we are not always good stewards. We know the sickness that has taken up residence in our souls, the sickness we call sin. If you knew you were sick and went to your doctor and your doctor only gave you cheerful news while neglecting to tell you that you have cancer, you might begin to wonder if your doctor only wanted to be "kind" or "nice". If your doctor never suggested that you get more exercise and to cut back on high fat foods, stop drinking and smoking, you might wonder if your doctor was staying current with the latest medical findings. This text has been used by many a preacher to point to our failure to be faithful disciples. It is easy to fall into this pattern as a preacher. There is always the temptation to make Xianity all about what we do or don't do.

But is this text about us or about God? Is it about our performance or about what God does? Let's look at the text one more time. Note the number of times Jesus says, "The seed fell". I count 4 times... "the seed fell, and fell, and fell, and fell". The image here is one of the sower throwing the seed out with abandon. God is a persistent sower. The seed is the word of God and God, the sower, is careless with the seed. The seed fell on good soil and bad soil. It fell on the hardened path and among the thorns. God threw out his word on all the world. The seed fell, and fell, and fell.

Jesus interpreted his own parable. “Some seed fell on the path and the evil one came and snatched it away.” If we interpret the text as being about us and what we do then our focus is on the path and not on the sower or the seed. We focus on Satan and what he does instead of focusing on God. But if we interpret the text as being about the sower we marvel at the generosity of God who continues to scatter his word upon the earth even if it is snatched away by the evil one.

“Some seed fell on rocky ground and grew for awhile, but trouble or persecution came and the seed withered.” If we focus on ourselves then we think only about the troubles and persecutions we face and about the cost of discipleship. That can lead us either to pride in ourselves for being such faithful disciples or to despair over the difficulties of living the Xian life. But if we focus on God the sower then we thank God for His faithfulness to us in that even when we deny him he still loves us and still showers us with the seed of his word.

“Some seed fell among thorns and there it competed with the cares of the world and the lure of wealth.” If we focus on ourselves then we worry about our possessions and the cares of this world. Our wealth becomes a stumbling block for us and we begin to think about ways we can avoid being stewards of God’s good gifts. But if we focus on God and the good gift of his word we discover that we can cast all our cares on Him for he cares for us. God proves his care for us in that he generously scatters the seed of his word among us calling us to trust in him above all things.

Today the seed of God's word has been cast out and it has fallen once again into your heart. The seed of the gospel is the good news. We hear it in our liturgy...

(8:30) "The Almighty and merciful God has had mercy upon you and has given His only Son to die for you and for His sake God forgives you all your sins. To all who receive Christ Jesus and believe in His name, God gives the right to become the children of God and promises them everlasting life."

There it is. That's the seed, the gospel, the good news!

(10:00) "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son to die for you. By water and the Spirit, He made you a member of His Body, the Church. Day after day, He fully forgives your sin, and the sin of all who repent and believe. Therefore, by His authority, I declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sin, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

There it is. That's the seed, the gospel, the good news!

The seed has fallen among us again today. God sows and sows and sows. And his word does not just come to us in this place as we worship. No, God the prodigal sower scatters the seed all over the world. One of my seminary professors, Dr. Alvin Rogness, said, "[We either see the hand of God in everything or in nothing.](#)" Those who believe see the hand of God sowing his seed in everything from the beauty of the birds singing their morning praise to God to the glory of the sunset at the close of day. Those who believe see the hand of God scattering seed among us in the ordinary events of life, in the witness of a mother who shares her faith with her family and in the witness of a man who is attentive to his work and responsibilities because he has faith. The seed of God's word falls into your life every day

where, hopefully, it finds a crack in the hard soil of your life, or a place among the thorns in your life or among the rocks in your path. And there the seed sits waiting for the miracle of growth to begin.

There is competition for the seed of God's word in our lives. The world is full of competing voices, worldly values and temptations of all kinds. The competition is tough for the word. Given the intensity of the competition the tiny seed of God's word doesn't seem to have much of a chance. After all, it is *only a word*. Yet this word is the **word of God** and as such is a powerful force that changes lives. It will change your life this day. Through the work of the Holy Spirit the seed of God's word grows where we think it has no chance at all.

Do you have any responsibility for making the seed grow in your life? The answer is both "yes" and "no". It is "no" insofar as you would not want to presume to take the place of the Holy Spirit which calls you into faith and nourishes your faith and helps you to believe. So, "no" you don't make the seed grow, that is the work of God. But the answer is also "yes". Yes, you have been given tools that enable you to respond to the seed that has been planted in your life.

These tools are the spiritual disciplines. They are like garden tools. They don't guarantee that the seed will grow, they don't make the seed grow, they are only garden tools. But the tools of spiritual discipline help prepare the soil and make the environment right for the seed to grow. What are these spiritual garden tools? They are:

1. Prayer

2. Worship
3. Scripture reading and study
4. Confession and
5. The Community of Faith

These are the tools that help prepare our hearts for the seed of God's word to grow and to produce a harvest. By using these tools we help prepare the soil in our hearts to be good soil for the word of God to find root and grow.

Isaiah said **“The word of the Lord will not return empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”** Our God is a generous God who sows the seed of his word with reckless abandon. His word has fallen into your heart this day. It lies there waiting to produce 30 fold, 60 fold and 100 fold. May God bless you and make your heart good soil that produces a rich harvest to the glory of God. Amen

Let's sing the sermon hymn, **“Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil”** hymn 713 in the blue WOV hymnal. There is only one verse so let's sing it twice.

From www.workingpreacher.org 7-13-08 by [Dale Allison](#), Errett M. Grable Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Early Christianity Pittsburgh Theological Seminary Pittsburgh, PA

“Yet the lesson for everybody else is still radical: riches are seductive and dangerous and can readily become an obstacle on the way to God. Even when we seek to use wealth for good, we too often end up being its slave rather than its master. We become like the rich man in 19:17-22, who could not follow Jesus because in truth he did not own his possessions: they rather owned him. While our gospel does not demand poverty of all, it does require freedom from whatever hinders obedience. So although we may find, living as we do in a modern capitalistic society, that it is seemingly inevitable to make friends of "dishonest wealth" (Luke 16:9), we must not be seduced into amassing goods because we find security in them. Our security needs to lie elsewhere; and our use of money must be determined by Jesus' demand to love God with all of our hearts, souls, and minds and our neighbours as ourselves.”