

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23  
6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10)  
July 12, 2020—Shepherd of the Mountains, Pinetop, AZ

INI

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in case you missed it, or just don't remember it, the fancy Latin phrase last week was "*lex semper accusat*" which means "the law always accuses." I bring that up again this week because, springing off of Paul's words last week, **"I do not do the good I want,"** Romans 7:19 I felt very convicted in reading the Parable of the Sower this week.

Jesus presents a parable which appears in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, each with Jesus' explanation. You might remember from Sunday school that a parable is a "heavenly story with an earthly meaning." It's a Divine truth using a word picture of a familiar, worldly situation or story to help us understand His eternal truths. In this one, there is a sower. There is seed being sown. And there is soil on which the seed is sown. The Sower is God. The seed is the Word of God. And the soil is us—humanity. Another fitting reading for us during the "Ordinary Time" in the church year, this green season of the church year, the season of growth.

There are four types of soil. First is the hard-packed ground of a path. This is the soil of unbelief. These people have the Word given to them, but it is offensive. They don't understand it. They reject it. So, Satan comes along and snatches it away. While God desires all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4), these people persist in their hardness of heart until eventually God hardens their hearts. Think back to Pharaoh in Exodus for a concrete example of this. Since you are here hearing these words, listening to the Word of God today, chances are you are not this type of soil.

No, of course not. As believers, here in church, we are the good soil, right? Well, this is where I found this reading convicting. Jesus says of this fourth soil, **"as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."**

But then His word from His apostle Paul rings in our ears again. **"I do not do the good I want, but I do the very thing I hate."** And the law accuses once more. Are we each bearing fruit? Are we each bearing fruit all the time? Sure, we look like good soil when we are sitting here in church. But outside, in our own lives, as we interact with our family and friends, as we engage in conversations with the unbelieving world, do we wither as the cares of this life choke out that Word of God?

We tend to do a very good job of sharing God's Word, of sowing His seed when we are among other Christians. And that is a good thing! But what about the other soil? Aren't we called to be imitators of Christ? (Ephesians 5:1) And doesn't He, in His wisdom, which looks foolish to us, cast the seed everywhere, on good and bad soil alike, knowing that it will always accomplish its purpose and never return empty? And yet, in the heat of opposition we often wither. Oh, we'll attempt to justify ourselves by saying that even if we didn't share our faith, we never let go of it ourselves. But where is the fruit of our faith when we claim to believe that the Word of God is living and active in us? Maybe we're rockier than we often care to admit.

And what about when someone else shares God's Word with us? Sure, we like the happier parts. We'll gladly hear them. Blessings. Provision. His steadfast love for all of His creation. But what about the parts of His Word that confront us? What about the parts that convict us? You shall not covet. You shall not steal. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. Love your enemy. Pray for those who persecute you. What about the parts that say we should sell possessions if they get in the way of following Jesus? What about the parts that say to gouge out an eye, cut off a hand, remove *anything*, any offending member that would prevent us from being true disciples? Do we embrace the difficulties of a life of repentance, of turning away from sinful desires, or do we allow and even encourage the cares of this life to spring up like thorns, choking out what spiritual

growth we could and should have and settle for worldly comfort instead? Maybe we have more thorns than we often care to admit.

Maybe...if we're honest with ourselves...maybe we are not the squeaky-clean Christians, the perfect soil we sometimes think we are.

An important reminder though, at this point, is that although the emphasis of our parable is on the power of the soil to impact the seed, the Gospel of our parable is that the seed alone (the message of Christ crucified and risen in our behalf) can make the soil grow things—such as faith and good works. God spoke through His prophet Isaiah to Israel of old and us saying, **“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, 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.”**

You see, as an earthly story, a parable has limits. It can only illustrate a few spiritual truths at best. So, it is with the Parable of the Sower. Although there are many ways in which God's Word is like a seed, there are some things God's Word can do that seeds cannot. A seed cannot change the soil on which it falls, but God's Word can and does change the heart.

The Word made flesh went out and accomplished His purpose. He took our thorns upon Himself. He bore them. He was pierced by them. And from His wounds poured out His blood, His lifegiving water which drowns out our thorns and washes away the rocks from our hearts leaving behind good, fertile soil.

This message of salvation through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh accomplishes its purpose. Only the Good News of this salvation earned for us on the cross can soften the hard heart. Only it can break up the rocks and overcome the thorns. And God does not sow His Word once and then give up. He sows His Word generously season after season, Sunday after Sunday. He sows His seed with a loving, reckless, foolish generosity on all soils, even us rocky, thorny, wannabe good soil Christians.

There is another fancy Latin term that we sometimes use. *Simul justus et peccator*. You may have heard it before. It means “simultaneously justified and sinner” or “saint and sinner.” Or in the context of our reading this morning, you could say we are simultaneously good soil and bad soil. The truth is that we all start out as bad soil until the Word transforms us. It is a lifelong process that we go through as He tends His garden, constantly caring for His soil and raising up His harvest.

God literally watered us at His baptismal font as the Holy Spirit planted the seed of faith in us through the Word. And as we return to His Word each week in church and in our daily devotions, He is plucking up weeds and thorns and removing stones, and making us into good soil to produce a good crop. Sometimes it's painful for us. Some of our rocks are big and stubborn. Some of our thorns are really sharp. And they resist His Word with its tilling and pruning and plucking. But as we continue in Him, as we grow in our faith, we see how much we can endure for His kingdom, how many harmful things and behaviors we can cast off, and how much fruit of repentance we can produce—sometimes a hundredfold, sometimes sixty, sometimes thirty.

As we go from here today, let us produce that fruit, not shrinking and withering away in the heat of opposition, not choked out by the cares of this life and the desire for things contrary to His Word. But hearing His Word once more, may it take root in our hearts and spring up to bear abundant fruits of repentance and thanksgiving as we go out in peace and joy sharing His Word, singing His praises, and sowing His seed on all types of soil as we strive to be imitators of Christ. He has made you and continues to make you into good soil and He will continue to give the growth. Amen.