

June 9, 2024

“Scattered Seeds”

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Intro:

Sometimes, the Scripture passage being preached from on a Sunday morning leaves the pastor with very little to say. The parable of the farmer scattering seed in Matthew 13 is one of those passages. There are a couple of reasons for this. The first is that Jesus is the master preacher and story-teller. He taught with authority and with a clarity that made the meaning clear to those who had ears to hear, while those whose hearts were not open were left in a state of confusion and misunderstanding. The second reason for this passage is that Jesus explains the message hidden in the story. Jesus doesn't always explain the meaning of his parables, but in this case he did.

So this morning, instead of trying to unpack the layered meaning from this parable for you, I encourage you to ask what Jesus is teaching you as you read it.

I will take a few moments to share some thoughts on how we can engage with the parable of the sower.

When I was working at summer camps as a cabin leader, this was my favourite passage to use as the foundation for the first evening devotions with my cabin. At camp you get a wide range of kids from a variety of backgrounds – some with strong church foundations, some who have been to camp for many years, some who have never been to church and know nothing about the Bible but are excited to be at camp and to learn everything, and some who couldn't care less about the Bible stuff and are only at camp because their parents made them go, or for the activities. Often I would have all of these various types of kids on the same week. So, I would have them open Matthew 13 with me and I would explain that each of them, regardless of why they were there or what they thought about the “church” aspect of camp, was mentioned in the Bible. From there, we would discuss the explanation of the parable that Jesus provided his disciples.

Explaining the Parable:

This is the beauty of Jesus' way of teaching. His messages always touched every person in whatever crowd or context he was speaking in. Not everyone appreciated what he had to say, but there was no missing that he was saying something that had the potential to speak directly to where they were in life. His teaching continues to be just as effective today as we read Scripture and meditate on it together in church.

We are all in the parable that Jesus told. This isn't just a story for those who have never heard about Jesus or God or the Bible. We are all somewhere in the field that the scattered seed of Jesus' good news lands on. Every time you gather for worship – whether in your regular church, or at a conference, or when visiting a church, God's word is given to you specifically. The seed of his word is being sown on the soil of your heart.

Let's go back a bit and clarify the process of sowing seeds. When we sow seeds today, we dig little holes or make straight rows. We carefully place the seeds and cover them up to give them the best chance to germinate properly. This is good practice, but it is not the way it was done in Jesus' parable. The process in Matthew 13 was more like over-seeding, kind of like what you would do to repair your lawn. Instead of digging and preparing the soil, the farmer would just walk through the field and scatter the seeds out on top of the ground by hand. Once he was done, he would trust to the natural patterns of rain and sun and wind to germinate and grow those seeds. This is why there are so many different types of soil in Jesus' parable.

It is helpful to keep this in mind as we place ourselves in this parable. Here we are, gathered to listen to what God has to say in the Bible. But we don't all have the same experience with what we hear.

Some of you are very much like the footpath – you hear, maybe you are listening, but what is said makes very little sense and so you let it slide in one ear and out

the other while you focus on what you consider to be more important things. You might feel like you had a nice time at church, but don't find much spiritual value in being here. Footpath people are also those who go to church but assume that they don't really have to listen because the message is for other people who are struggling in their faith, but not them.

Some of you are the shallow soil. You are made of good dirt, but it is not deep and underneath it is a hard, rocky layer that stops plants from developing a good root system. You are excited about what you hear about Jesus, but you have a shallow faith with no depth. Perhaps this is because you have no support system besides the occasional hour on Sunday morning. Perhaps it is because even though you are excited, your family is not. Or maybe you want to fit in at work and being a Christian is not the way to make that happen. Or maybe you have intellectual questions about some aspects of Christianity and you have never tried to find the answers, so the uncertainty keeps you from developing a deeper faith.

Some of you are weedy ground. You are made of good soil and receive Jesus gladly, but He has to compete with other concerns and desires in your life. Perhaps you started out with good intentions, but following Jesus well is hard and gets in the way of realizing the success, wealth, or popularity that you also want to have. And so, while you might still keep attending church and sort of trying to follow Jesus, your life shows very little fruit or evidence of that.

Some of you are good soil. You are ready to receive God's word and allow it to transform your life. Jesus says that those lives produce a harvest of 30, 60, or even 100 times as much as was planted – meaning that those lives have a positive impact for God everywhere you go, and that impact extends beyond what you even know.

There are no surprises or mysteries in this passage. We can picture the image Jesus is using, and because He has explained it clearly, we understand what He is getting at.

What kind of soil are you? What kind of soil are you today?

The Farmer:

There is one other aspect of this parable that I want to touch on this morning. That is the farmer. Jesus focuses on explaining things about the soil – the people that he is speaking to. But the farmer and the seed he is planting are also central to the parable.

Recall our discussion of carefully preparing the soil before any seeds are planted. Part of that process is also intentionally placing certain seeds in certain areas of the garden where they will grow the best. The farmer in Jesus' story doesn't do that. He has one seed, one message, and he tosses it out in all directions regardless of what the soil is like.

The seed is the message of the Gospel. It is the message of God's awesome love for all of creation and humanity. All too easily we fall into the trap of thinking that we need to be selective about how and where we share that message. We can also get caught in the trap of deciding who should receive it. We want it always to be planted in good soil, and so we only ever look for people who are primed and ready to receive it.

But according to this parable, that isn't how it should work. The Gospel is for everyone – it is freely given so that it can be freely received. Our job, as farmers, is to scatter the seed. It is up to those who hear it to accept or reject it, based on what kind of soil they are. The great wonder and mystery is that we never know how the message will be received and it isn't until a life of faith grows (or doesn't) that we can see the result. Sometimes we never get to see that fruit grow. And that is okay. Our task is to be the farmer who scatters seed all over the field – on the good soil and the not-as-good soil, and then to trust that it is good seed and that it will grow by the grace and care of God.

Let's pray.