

12 July 2020

Introduction

God's word is like the rain that waters the earth and brings forth vegetation. It is also like the sower who scatters seed indiscriminately. Our lives are like seeds sown in the earth. Even from what appears to be little, dormant, or dead, God promises a harvest. At the Lord's table we are fed with the bread of life, that we may bear fruit in the world.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, we thank you for planting in us the seed of your word. By your Holy Spirit help us to receive it with joy, live according to it, and grow in faith and hope and love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

Romans 8:1-11

There is no condemnation for those who live in Christ. God sent Christ to accomplish what the law was unable to do: condemn sin and free us from its death-dealing ways. The Spirit now empowers proper actions and values in our lives and gives us the promise of resurrected life.

¹There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

In Matthew's gospel, both Jesus and his disciples "sow the seed" of God's word by proclaiming the good news that "the kingdom of heaven is near."

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!"

¹⁸“Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Sermon

Pentecost 6 A – Romans 8:1-11, Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Sower, Seed, Soil

The Sower reveals that in regards to extending the Good News God is generous to the point of foolishness.

There are two distinct parts to the Gospel reading from Matthew, which were first expressed by Mark, and also related by Luke.

Verses 1-8 are presented as a parable from Jesus; a short story using familiar characters and common circumstances to reveal a deeper truth.

In this case the people who listen to Jesus beside the Sea of Galilee hear about a crazy farmer.

Instead of staking out a garden patch, loosening the soil, adding fertiliser and carefully planting seeds in neat rows, the way we do...

Or even casting grain over a larger, untilled field, the way they used to do it in Jesus' day...

The Sower acts as if there's no limit to his seed.

He scatters grain on hardened footpaths.

On gravel.

Among weeds.

And on good soil.

Any human master would have scolded a servant for being so wasteful.

But not in this story.

Here it seems to be enough that the seed which fell on good soil yielded a rich bounty.

And if we take the characters and elements of the parable as a description of God we might be inclined to say:

God is the unnamed and unseen master of a large estate.

Jesus has been sent to sow grain.
Everywhere.

The seed or grain – representing God's word of grace and mercy – seems to be available in endless supply.

And that's okay.

Some of it will take root and grow,
and yield a rich harvest.

On the lips of Jesus
the parable reveals a God of extraordinary generosity.
almost to the point of foolishness.

There is no limit to the amount of grace.

A step further,
we might consider the purpose of the parable for the members of Matthew's community.

At Jesus' ascension
they have been asked to serve as witnesses;
to be sowers of God's loving and saving Word.

Sent to the ends of the earth.

Frustrated, at times,
by finding themselves in places where their message seemed to bear little fruit.

In this case the parable urges them to keep sowing.
Everywhere.

And let God worry about the quality of the soil on which the Gospel is cast.

But by the time Mark, and Matthew and Luke get hold of this parable,
and offer an interpretation
something has gone wrong.

A story about a generous and gracious Sower
turns into a morality play which has members of the audience wondering what kind of soil they might be.

It is a backward step from Grace to Law.

Don't be like the hard-packed foot path.
Those kinds of people are closed from the start.

Don't be like the rocky earth,
which has no real depth or staying power.

Do be like soil which allows thorns and other weeds to choke out the grain.
These folks are easily distracted by things like money and fame.

Rather, be like good soil,
able to receive the seed of God's Word,
and to grow,
and produce a rich harvest.

As if soil decides who or what it is;
able to have a will,
and morph from one type into another.

This interpretation takes the Gospel out of Jesus' hands,
and puts the work of salvation into ours.

What we think,
what we do,
becomes the test of our worthiness.

And grace disappears.

So as we read this passage
I would suggest you pay more attention to the parable
than to its so-called interpretation.

That way we might see,
as some in our study group noticed,
that even what we might consider wasted seed
has fed the birds along the pathway,
or created tiny composted bits of soil among the rocks,
and provided a little food for those prepared to sort through the thorns.

God's seed makes changes everywhere.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us pray for our shared world.

A brief silence.

Gracious God, your word has been sown in many ways and places. We pray for missionaries and newly planted congregations around the world. Inspire us by their witness to the faith we share. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Creating God, the mountains and hills burst into song and the trees and fields clap their hands in praise. We pray for the birds and animals who make their home in the trees, and for lands stripped bare by deforestation. Empower us to sustainably use what you have given. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Reigning God, we pray for our nation's leaders. Increase their desire for justice and equality. We pray for our enemies. Bridge the chasms that divide us and guide authorities to a deep and lasting peace. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Abiding God, care for all who are in need (*especially*). For those who are doubting, renew faith. For those who are worrying, provide release. For those who are struggling, ease burdens. For those in fear, give hope. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Renewing God, revive your church in this place. Nourish and nurture the seeds you have planted, that we might grow as disciples. Replace what has been depleted. Sustain our ministries (*especially*) and deepen relationships with the wider community. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Eternal God, we give thanks for all who have died (*especially Nathan Söderblom, Bishop of Uppsala, whom we commemorate today*). Comfort us in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Receive these prayers, O God, and those too deep for words; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Blessing

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

God, the creator, ✝ Jesus, the Christ,
and the Holy Spirit, the comforter,
bless you and keep you in eternal love.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Christ is with you.

Thanks be to God.