



Pentecost 6-July 12, 2020
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 55:10-13

“Listen! A Sower Went Out to Sow”

Sermon by Randall J. Questad

Grace be to you from God our Father from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Listen! A sower went out to sow.” **“Let anyone with ears listen!”** **“Listen”** was the first and the last word Jesus spoke as he taught his disciples the parable of the sower. Listening was just as important and apparently was just as much of a problem when Jesus taught this parable as it still is today. So, Jesus repeated, **“Listen”**. Kim and I just enjoyed a few days of vacation in a beautiful setting in a cabin near Terry Peak in the Black Hill’s this week. After spending nearly four days with our family of three children, their spouses, and their 9 children, we heard **“Listen to me!”** many times. After finally getting a baby to sleep among the noise and chaos one evening, the command **“Listen to me, you better not wake up your sister”** had to be repeated over and over to be sure it was heard. One of the vehicles in our traveling caravan took a longer time returning to the cabin one day when the vehicle made a wrong turn. I heard the spouse had told the driver of this vehicle, **“I told you should have turned back there, why didn’t you “Listen to me.”** The response was, **“Well, I didn’t hear you”**. Of course, hearing isn’t a sense that usually improves with age. I’m not expecting the epitaph on my tombstone to read, **“He was a good listener.”** One of the most challenging parts of a preacher’s job is wondering if the words you are speaking are being heard. And this wondering or uncertainty of what will happen with the seeds that are sown can be exhausting.

You might know by now that the parable of the sower is my favorite parable. This parable was the focus of the scripture, music, and message of my ordination service. The picture on your bulletin for today is one of my favorite renderings of this parable and was given to me as a gift for my ordination and now hangs in a focal point in our living room. Maybe this was just a reminder from my family that I too should **listen** better. This parable is also significant to me as I transitioned from the vocation of planting seeds for grain harvest as a farmer to sowing seeds in the ears of listeners as a preacher. But I especially love the parable of the sower because this is one of the few parables that Jesus explained to his disciples because Jesus wanted to ease their minds when they became frustrated in their ministry as they wondered or doubted if the seeds they were planting were being heard.

Jesus experienced this reality in his ministry on the same day that he told this parable. Jesus was not having a easy day of ministry when he told this parable to his disciples at the end of the day. His day began with his disciples in class. And like all teachers, Jesus must have wondered how well his students were listening. After a period of teaching, his disciples were ready for a break from listening, so as his disciples walked through a grain field, they plucked the seeds from the heads of grain and

ate them. Taking a short lunch break should not have been a problem, but this walk through the grain field started an attack against Jesus that did not end until he was crucified. The keepers and teachers of the law, the Pharisees, were watching and had seen what Jesus had done. They weren't interested in listening to Jesus. Instead, they accused Jesus of not keeping the Sabbath laws. Jesus and his disciples were doing unnecessary work by plucking the heads of grain on the Sabbath and the Pharisees were quick to bring this breaking of the third commandment to the attention of Jesus. Jesus told his accusers that he did not come to make sacrifices, but to deliver mercy to people with his word. His accusers did not listen to these words Jesus spoke. Instead they plotted against Jesus and set another trap to catch Jesus at breaking the rules of the Sabbath.

They set the next trap by placing a man with a withered hand by the synagogue where they knew Jesus would be arriving. As Jesus saw this man, the Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Jesus turned the trap around to the ones who set the trap and asked these Pharisees if they had a sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, would it be lawful to pull it out? This turning of the trap to the Pharisees, silenced them, but Jesus kept speaking and told them that this man who had a withered hand was of more value than the sheep. And Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath. Strike two against Jesus.

The Pharisees still did not listen to Jesus and continued their plot of catching Jesus breaking the commandments. They next brought a demon possessed man to Jesus to see if he would heal him. Jesus didn't look at the scoreboard to see how many strikes he had against him. Instead, he repeated the act of showing mercy by also healing this man on the Sabbath. The Pharisees then accused Jesus of being Satan himself since he could do what they could not. Jesus exorcised the devil from this man simply by his speaking. This long day for Jesus of being accused time after time of not obeying the law in the right way was still not over when Jesus was told that his mother and his brothers wanted to speak to him. Jesus then broke the next commandment of honoring his family by ignoring the request and saying that those that listened to him were his mother and his brothers.

After this tiring day of Jesus teaching and it seemed like no one was listening, he left the house and went to the sea. Instead of finding a quiet place to rest, Jesus looked at the shore, he saw a crowd of people who had ears to listen. But Jesus didn't instruct the disciples to row away from this crowd of people so that he could rest, instead Jesus looked at the crowd with compassion and told his disciples the parable of the sower by saying, "Listen! A sower went out to sow."

The disciples didn't understand the parable, so Jesus explained this important lesson of ministry. The first lesson is to sow seeds. Jesus instructed his disciples to sow seeds everywhere. Jesus told them to let seeds fall on hard paths, rocky soil, soil infested with thorns and of course on good soil. Jesus taught his disciples not to carefully direct where they sowed God's word, but carelessly spread his word everywhere. Then Jesus explained to his disciples what happens when God's word is preached so that they wouldn't become discouraged when they doubted if what they were preaching was being heard.

Jesus had experienced such a day himself. It seemed that few were listening to what he was saying. In fact, it seemed that most people were accusing Jesus that he wasn't doing his job. But when

Jesus got into the boat, he saw a crowd of people who had been listening and wanted to hear more words of mercy. When Jesus could have been discouraged from his day's preaching, he may have been surprised by the unexpected results and the crowd of people who had come to the shore to listen to him.

This is what the prophet Isaiah said happens when God's word is preached. God's word is like rain and snow that comes down from heaven and does not return until it waters the earth and is fruitful. When God's word goes out, it will accomplish what God plans for it to do. God's word that comes down to the ears of listeners will bear fruit in ways we would never expect.

Isaiah and Jesus remind us that we are not in control of God's word. They remind us that preachers do not get to decide when the seed bears fruit or what it looks like when it returns. They remind us it is not up to us to direct how or where the seed should be planted. They remind us that we are to keep carelessly and generously sowing seed even when it may seem no one is listening.

I will admit to you, it is exhausting preaching to what appears to be a congregation that has no ears to listen. It is exhausting for the leaders of this parish to decide the best way to deliver the word of God in these peculiar times. This past week it was exhausting as this parish councils considered the many precautions such as mask wearing, assigned seating, silence from singing when recorded music was played, avoiding any close contact such as hand shaking, ways to administer the Lord's Supper and wonder if God's word would still be heard. All this exhaustion could lead us to just want to get in a boat and get away. But when we turn around, we know that there are ears waiting to hear. This is what the parable of the sower is all about. Carelessly and generously scattering seed in ways a farmer would never do. But God's word has gone out again today. "Listen, a sower went out to sow." God's word does not return empty. Amen.