

Pentecost 7-July 16, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Good Soil Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

Where does the phrase come from, "Slow and steady wins the race." Of course, you learn this lesson from Aesop's Fable "The Tortoise and the Hare". The youngest of children learn this moral of the story early in their lives and this lesson is so clear no matter how old you are it is never forgotten. The older I get, the more I like the fable of Tortoise and the Hare that gives hope for those who are slowing down, and we still have a chance to win a race. You really don't need someone to explain this fable to you. The message is clear, and it always has been.

Parables, however, are not fables. Jesus often taught using parables and we will be hearing some of them in the next few weeks. The lessons to be learned from a parable are most often hidden and strangely from us. Jesus doesn't tell parables so that everyone will understand what he is talking about, he tells them so that only those who have ears to listen will hear. The skipped verses, verses 10-17 from Matthew address the hiddenness that happens when Jesus teaches using parables. Even this very familiar parable of the sower that we all seem to know by heart and understand was not understood by the large crowd that heard Jesus tell it for the first time. And then when the disciples got Jesus away from the crowd of people, they might have pretended to know what Jesus was teaching, but they too would have headed into the wrong ditch of what Jesus intended in this parable. You almost imagine, outspoken Peter asking Jesus that day by the sea, "I don't think those people had a clue what you were saying, why don't you tell us about the parable of the sower, so at least we will know."

The parable of the sower was the gospel reading for my ordination and it is still one of my favorite parables. But like many people who think they understand this parable, the more I think I know about this parable, I too find myself captivated by the mysteries of this parable.

I think it is safe to say when this large crowd that listened to Jesus tell the parable of the sower for the first time, they were doing what you might have been doing today as you heard it. Your focus might have turned to thinking about these four types of soil. Three of them: the hard path, the rocky soil, and the soil that had the thorny weeds that produced nothing and the good soil which was the only soil that produced anything that could be measured.

Jesus doesn't say there is only one reason for telling this parable. Jesus certainly divided the hearers of God's word by comparing them to different soil types. It may not be hard for you to think of someone you know who may fit the categories of soil that Jesus describes. Or you may be like me and realize that there have been seasons in your life where you have been each one of these soils. It is not hard to imagine that when Jesus was talking about the seed falling on the rocky soil that sprang up quickly, but when persecution arose immediately fell away that Jesus was talking about his own chosen disciples who had just met Jesus. Most of

these disciples after hearing Jesus say, "Follow Me" sprang up quickly, but when they saw Jesus die on the cross and then were accused of being followers of Jesus, they fell away even more quickly. Jesus could have been talking about the rich young ruler who was at first eager to receive what Jesus said until Jesus told him in order to follow him, he had to sell all that he had. We all have idols. Jesus points out that wealth is a big one that will prevent us from hearing everything that Jesus has to tell us. And there are people who just are hard soil that don't want to hear a word that God has to say. I remember entering rooms in the Avera hospital where I did my chaplaincy training and after I announced who I was and what I had to offer, I was told they didn't need anything that I had to give them. There was nothing I could do to make the soil open for the seed to start a root before being snatched away.

So where is the lesson or purpose of Jesus telling this parable? Even though Jesus explains the characters, the seed, the soil, the birds, and the thorns in this parable, an explanation is not good news. There isn't even a catching phrase like "slow and steady wins the race" to draw from this story that Jesus told. Would it help you if before you go home today that I were to charge you with the project of making yourselves into better soil this week so that you could be more productive and better listeners next week? One thing is clear from this parable and that is that Jesus never intended to tell the parable of the sower to prescribe to you steps that you could take to make yourselves into good soil.

This parable should give you and I comfort knowing that we are not in charge of the soil. It is not up to us to fix the hard paths or remove rocks or even spray the weeds that we know are why the seeds are not taking root. Jesus doesn't tell us to get to work to make the hard soils into fertile soils. Jesus does however want us to be good soils that will be productive. Soils that are eager to receive the word that he is scattering. And how is that done? Simply by scattering seed, God's word wherever and whenever we have the chance. Scatter seeds in places that don't make sense to others.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus describes the sower as a careless farmer. One who broadcasts his seeds rather than carefully placing them where he knows they will be productive. The sower takes a chance by letting seeds fall in places that others would save their seed. The sower in this parable might even scatter seeds by supporting a ministry for people who have been hurt by the institution of a church and now feels safer by meeting to hear God's word in a bar. The sower in this parable would let seed fall on children who are not members of our parish whose parents send them to our VBS program for a day. The sower of this parable would let his seed fall on young adolescents who would take a week of their busy summers to hear what Jesus has to say to them on the western prairies of South Dakota while riding on a horse.

Seed has fallen on you today regardless of what type of soil you think you are. It doesn't matter if you have received this seed eagerly or reluctantly because the sower of this seed does not stop seeding. His word will come to you again and as the rain and snow fall to the earth, it will not return without doing what our Lord has sent it to you. This is the good news for you and me. Amen