

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

¹ That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear.”

¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. ²² The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” **This is the gospel of our Lord.**

Dear Friends,

The gospel lessons for the next (3) weeks contain some of the parables that Jesus told during his ministry. A parable is a story that Jesus uses to make a point. Usually the people or items in a parable are symbolic of something that impacts our spiritual lives. In this morning’s parable, the seed that the sower sows is symbolic of God’s Word as it is proclaimed in the world and the different results the Word has on people. As with all of Jesus’ lessons, this is important and Jesus emphasizes that by telling us, **“He who has ears, let him hear.”**

When we think about a farmer sowing seed in a field we think about a tractor pulling a sower that can plant anywhere from 6-24 rows at a time in nice straight rows but at the time of Jesus things were a little bit different.

The sower had a bag of seed over his shoulder and walked through the field casting the seed in front of him as he went. It wasn’t as efficient as today and instead of having nice straight rows in the field, the planting of the seed was a lot more random. Jesus uses that to explain what happens when the seed of the gospel goes out.

I. In the 1st example he tells us, **“A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.”** This is like inviting someone to come to worship services and they respond with, “I’m not interested in anything religious.” Maybe they think they have everything they need in life – a nice house, a good job and an expensive car and they can take care of themselves. Or maybe they have had a “bad” experience where they went to a church and someone said or did something that offended them

and now they are making a conscious effort to be unreceptive. They are pushing God and his Word away before it even has a chance to work.

Lest we become smug, know that we are not above this problem. There are times when we just don't have time for anything "religious" either. There are times when the things of this world are just more appealing than God's Word and we push God aside and opt for other pursuits.

II. As the parable continues, **"Some [seed] fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root."** These are people who hear the Word and are excited to learn more. They are thrilled to hear that Jesus has paid for their sins and are glad the Holy Spirit planted the seed of faith in their hearts as they listened to God's Word. Maybe they enter Bible Information Class and become members. Now that they are a Christian life is going to be perfect and then troubles or difficulties come along.

Their foundation in God's Word isn't very deep and they begin to wonder why God would let difficulties to come into their lives. Maybe they get mad at God, but their doubts cause them to start to stay away from his Word.

Troubles can come in all different forms. Maybe it is a loss of a job or loved one. Maybe a serious illness. Or maybe they are challenged about some of the teachings of the Bible:

Why do we baptize babies?

Why don't we join together with certain organizations.

Why don't we invite everyone to come to the Lord's Supper?

Why can't we live together before we get married?

Why can't Aunt Martha, who is Catholic, sing at my wedding?

And the list could go on and on. The Bible has an answer for these questions but this person has shallow roots and doesn't turn to God's Word. They are easily swayed by popular opinion and the pressure uproots their faith. It's not easy being a Christian.

Many of you have felt the same pressures from troubles in your lives or questions about your faith that you don't know how to answer. A lot of times it is easier to abandon your faith than to seek the answers God gives us in his Word. And when the answers God Word gives are not in line with the influences of society we find ourselves wavering too. Without deep roots it is hard to give a faithful witness to the truths found in the Bible.

III. **"Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants."** This is the one I think we all can identify with. Jesus explained it this way, **"The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful."** Just like weeds constantly pop up in the garden, so we have many distractions that pop into our lives every day that try to overtake our lives. Maybe it's work, or trying to keep our kids busy this summer, or camping, or hobbies, or whatever it might be. It's so easy for our priorities to get messed up so that church ends up on the bottom. We miss worship for a week, then two or three and that turns into a

month or two. The longer we stay away from church the harder it is to come back because we get into the habit of doing other things.

We have these Three examples of how the Word went out but didn't survive in the hearts of those who heard it. These three examples highlight for us what we might call *The unholy trinity* which is working hard to destroy our faith. In the 1st example we had Satan snatching the seed away. In the 2nd example it was the sinful nature that pushed God away and in the 3rd example it was the influences of the world. The unholy trinity (Satan, the world and our own sinful nature) work hard in our lives to destroy the seed of faith planted in our hearts and without the help of God and his Word, we easily lose the battle. But there is a 4th part to this parable.

IV. “Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” We all hope that this 4th example represents us. We have heard the Word and we know how Jesus paid for our sins on the cross. We confess our sins and are happy to hear they are forgiven. We trust in Jesus as our Savior. Yet, how are we cultivating the “soil” of our hearts?

Just think about the time you have in a week. There are 168 hours in a week, how much time do you devote to worship, Bible Study and putting your faith into action? On the average we spend about 100 hours sleeping and working. That leaves about 68 hours for other things. It's easy to spend 20-30 hours in front of the computer or TV. That still leaves 30-40 hours for other things. You might spend an hour in church – maybe two if you attend a Bible Class. That would be about 1% of your time devoted to your spiritual health. I would hope that you spend some time at home in personal devotions. During this pandemic, maybe you have been able to volunteer and help fellow members or people in the community. As we look to hear and study God's Word and to put our faith into action we are keeping ourselves rooted in Good soil and the Holy Spirit helps us to bear “fruits of faith” those are actions guided by God's Word.

Remember that we are all sinners and none of us is perfect. There are times when someone will get under your skin and offend you. There are times when things won't happen the way you think they should. Those are times when we need God's word to guide us to talk to our fellow Christians. To work through the issues, to persevere and to forgive.

The world would encourage you to give up and look for something or someone else but God's Word reminds us that there is only one person to look to and that is Jesus Christ who brings us forgiveness and the love and grace to forgive others. Only God's Word can give us the wisdom and strength and peace we need to live in this world – to be the seed that fell on good ground and produces fruit.

So, you that have ears, listen to the Word, let it cultivate the faith in your hearts to keep you securely rooted in the Word, and then you will be able to produce an abundance of fruitful work for the Lord. Amen.