

Luke 8:4-15 | Sexagesima

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⁴As a large crowd was gathering and people from one town after another were making their way to him, he spoke using a parable. ⁵A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he sowed, some fell along the path. It was trampled, and the birds of the sky devoured it. ⁶Other seed fell on rocky ground. As soon as it grew, it withered away, because it had no moisture. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns. The thorns grew up with it and choked it. ⁸Other seed fell into good soil. It grew and produced fruit—one hundred times as much as was sown.” As he said these things, he called out, “Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear!”

⁹His disciples asked him, “What does this parable mean?”

¹⁰He said, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest I speak in parables so that ‘even though they see, they may not see, and even though they hear, they may not understand.’ ¹¹This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. ¹²Those along the path are the ones who hear it, but then the Devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts to keep them from believing and being saved. ¹³Those on the rocky ground are the ones who, when they hear, receive the word with joy, but they have no root. So they believe for a while, but then fall away in a time of testing. ¹⁴The seeds that fell into the thorns are the ones who hear the word, but as they go on their way they are choked by the worries, riches, and pleasures of life, so they do not mature. ¹⁵And the seeds in the good ground are the ones who hear the word with an honest and good heart, hold on to it tightly, and produce fruit as they patiently endure.

Scripture Alone (or “God is a Reckless Farmer”)

I’m not much a farmer (I’m a pastor after all), so I don’t know much about farming, but I do know this much: When you plant seeds, you plant them where and when they have the best chance of growing. You probably even test the soil. You make sure that the seeds will come up according to your own plan. You don’t let the birds get them. You don’t plant your seed when the ground is frozen. You don’t plant your seeds on rocks. You till your ground and then plant the seeds.

Well, there’s something wrong with the farmer in the parable. This is not the way good farmers act. He’s reckless. He’s wasting seed, he’s sowing seed where it has very little chance of growing. He’s planting it where the ground hasn’t been tilled yet, where the ground is hard. He’s planting it where there’s no water. He’s planting it where there’s weeds.

This is a foolish, reckless farmer. But the farmer in this parable? It’s God.

Last week we saw that God’s grace does not work the way we think it should work. God has grace for us not because we’ve earned it. God’s grace is based on the Giver, not the receiver. Today, through the parable, God teaches about His Word. And it too does not work the way we think it should work.

God is the sower in the parable, sowing His Word. And God, it would seem, is reckless. He doesn’t test the soil before he sows His Word. He just throws it out there. Everywhere. In other words, He doesn’t do a demographic study before He sends out His Word. Can you imagine if God did a demographic study before sending His Word out?

Oregon, WI, a small village on the outskirts of Madison in Dane County, a region known for ideologies that often conflict with God’s Word. Oregon is growing a little, but not a whole lot. Demographically, it doesn’t make sense. It would be foolish, it would be reckless, for God to

send His Word here because the return on investment would be terrible. If He wanted to grow His church, why not send His Word to where there's more people - more people open to His Word? But God, it would seem, is reckless. You are all here as a product - as the fruit - of that Word being thrown out to you.

Well that kind of makes us feel good right? We're believers. We're not like everyone who rejected that Word. 'I must have have some pretty good soil if God chose in invest in me.'

Halfway between the two congregations I served prior to coming here, there was a town called "Fertile." It was an ironic little town. The soil was all sand. That sandy soil, as I understand, wasn't necessarily good for growing crops. The soil dries out very easily. Fertile wasn't exactly very fertile. But it's a good deception - if you want to try to locate farmers to your town. And it worked, more farmers ironically decided to try out Fertile than most other towns around it.

See, our soil isn't so good either. But we want to make it look that way. We want to feel good about ourselves, our soil, when in reality, it's nothing but sand....or rocks, or thorns. So the fact that you and I have this Word only makes God appear more reckless. In the parable, Jesus describes three bad soil types: Hardened soil, rocky soil, and thorny soil.

What does it mean to have hardened soil? Well the seeds sprout, but because the soil it hard, they're trampled down and birds eat what's left. If you've ever come to church, listened intently to the sermon, sung all the hymns - in other words, let the seed sprout - but then after it was all over, you completely forgot about God's Word and how important it is for your life, and instead paid more attention to the cares of the world, maybe the football game on later that day, or how much work you've got to do... **Your heart was like the hardened soil.**

What about rocky soil? With the rocky soil, the seeds sprouted but just as soon withered away. Maybe you remember a time when you were so moved by God's Word. Maybe it was during your confirmation, during an illness, in a time of loss, in a time of sorrow. Maybe it was through a book, or a video, or a podcast you listened to. Maybe it was while you were listening to that awesome song on the Christian radio station. You were gripped by God's Word. It felt awesome to be a Christian. But then time passed. You got used to God's Word. Although you continued to hear God's Word, nevertheless, His Words in the sermons you hear now, and in the liturgy, don't *seem* as glorious and comforting as they once did... **Your heart was like the rocky soil.** The seed sprouted quickly, but just as quickly withered away. Your heart was looking for an experience, rather than the objective reality that Christ and His Word is the one thing needful.

And then there's the thorny soil. Maybe you've received God's Word very seriously and have never gotten out of the habit of hearing His Word and receiving His body and blood often for the forgiveness of your sins. But you know you are blessed with many abilities and gifts. You have many things to do, many things which aren't exactly in keeping with your vocation as a Christian. You let the Word grow in your heart, but you also let other things grow alongside, maybe some things which distract from the Word. Some thorny sins and habits, temptations which spring up when you aren't careful to watch out for them and defend yourself against them with the Word... **Your heart has thorns mixed in with its soil.**

Maybe some of these fit you better than others (I know some especially fit me), but in reality, *all* of these soil types fit each one of us, maybe more or less at different times. Even pastors have hard, rocky, and thorny soil. It does not make sense for God to even bother with us. Our soil is terrible. It's dead! Our hearts are dead. They are incapable of growing anything. Yet God has sown the seed of His Word in our hearts. God is a terrible farmer.

Or is He? After all, we have faith. Last week, we heard the parable of the Vineyard. God owned the vineyard, and it appeared, that God was a foolish vineyard owner. He paid the last workers way more than He should have. He paid people who didn't work. He didn't pay them according to their own merit, but according to His generosity. That was a picture of God's grace. God is generous in His grace. It's for all people. Through Jesus' death on the cross, God has grace for the entire world. He admits people into His vineyard because of Jesus, not because of any work they've done. Here again, it doesn't make sense for God to invest in us, because our soil is dead. He doesn't give us His Word because we have the right soil. No, God is generous. He liberally gives His Word to us and He makes it grow, not because our hearts' conditions are right, but through the work of the Holy Spirit in the means of grace.

God has planted the seed of His Word in our hearts, and against all odds, despite our poor soil, God has caused it to spring forth and grow. He's changed our soil - He's made it fertile. Soil can't just magically make itself fertile. It has to be changed from the outside.

Look back at our Old Testament lesson today, Isaiah 55.

¹⁰Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return there unless they first water the earth, make it give birth, and cause it to sprout, so that it gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

¹¹in the same way my word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty. Rather, it will accomplish whatever I please, and it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it.

In Isaiah's Words, it's not the soil which makes the seed grow. It's what God sends from heaven. He sends rain and snow. He waters it. What does He send for us? He gives us water: Baptism. He gives us snow, or rather pure white hearts in absolution - the forgiveness of our sins - in which we return to our baptism daily. He gives us His body and blood in the Lord's Supper. All things which water the seed of our faith and make it grow.

God intended to bring you to faith by His Word. It wasn't just an accident or by chance that you grew up hearing the Word of God. God is intentional. His Word does not return to Him void. It accomplishes what He desires, and it prospers, it grows. And He intends to grow your faith until it's ready to be harvested, when He'll bring you home to heaven.

In the meantime, we still all have these soil types, our soil is not yet perfect. We all are tempted by the devil, the world, and our own flesh, all factors which attempt to steal God's Word right out of our hearts.

But God knows what you need. This is why Jesus spoke the parable, why He has given us the picture of the Kingdom of God in farming language. He didn't speak these parables to unbelievers to make them believe. He spoke them to believers - to us - to Christians to

strengthen us in our faith and encourage us to hold fast to the Word, to hold fast to the seed of the Word, lest the devil, our own flesh, or the world try to snatch it from us.

God has given you a picture of how He provides for you, through a parable in simple farming language: Seeds, grain, and water. Through the seed of His Word, through the grain and His true Body in the Lord's Supper, and the water of Baptism - all combined with the Word, God creates and grows your faith.

God's Word is exactly *and only* what we need to have faith. Scripture alone creates faith in God's grace.

Tomorrow, our church is going to meet with Resurrection Lutheran Church in Verona to discuss evangelism and outreach. We'll talk about some practical things, we might even talk about demographics and some pragmatic ideas for spreading God's Word and growing His vineyard. We can be good stewards for thinking and talking about such things, but the growth of God's vineyard, and the growth of faith, isn't up to us. That's God's work.

Either God is a reckless farmer, throwing His Word to us with our poor soil, our faulty reason, strength, and abilities which are not able to know Him or come to Him on our own or change our status one bit. Or, Scripture actually does what it says. Scripture alone, apart from anything in us, apart from our reason or strength, reveals God's grace, creates faith, and sanctifies us. It does not return void. It accomplishes what God desires. And God, despite your dead soil, has created faith in you by the power of His Word. And He still is making it grow through His Word and Sacraments, until He decides to harvest - when He'll gather a complete harvest from soil that was once dead. God, it turns out, is the most perfect farmer of all.

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