

Sermon for Proper 10A
Sunday, July 16, 2023
“What kind of seed are you?”

Text: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This morning we are continuing the series of lessons on the teachings of Jesus about discipleship—what it means to be one of his followers. The series began with Jesus talking about taking in the harvest, but this morning, he turns our attention to the beginning of the harvest, the first step required to reap a good harvest; that is, the sowing of the seeds.

It is a rare treat when we get a gospel lesson where Jesus explains so precisely what he meant by a parable which he told. But today, we are blessed to hear such a lesson. It is a blessing to preachers, as well; how can one explain a parable of Jesus better than the explanation that Jesus gives from his own mouth? It's a gift to have Jesus explain his own teaching. Now first of all we have to understand that in this parable Jesus was not talking about farming or growing a garden. That's probably why the twelve apostles and his other disciples seemed confused at what he had said. Rather, he was giving advice on what they could do to help him spread his message and improve their lives. In the words of this parable, the result spreading of well-sown seeds is not a lemon tree, it's a strong, faithful disciple who then goes out and throws more seeds and makes more disciples.

Now the thing about parables is that they allow us to imagine a little and take the role of any character as it applies to our own life. With regard to today's parable, we could be the sower or we could be the seed. So the questions that this parable puts before us could be: What kind of seeds do you want to sow, or what kind of seed did you grow up to be? Have you planted or been planted in good soil, on rocky soil, or are you going to be the shoot that gets plucked up by the Evil One? The reality is that, at any given time, we could be any one of these kinds of seeds and we could be the sower having to deal with various planting conditions.

Indeed, even the guys (and gals) who followed Jesus around and heard these things straight from the teacher's mouth often did not get it; sometimes they themselves were the seeds planted on rocky soil or plucked up by the Evil One. Sometimes we hear the word, we hear the sermon preached by the preacher or we read a passage in the Bible, but we don't really get it or want to get it. It's almost like it falls on deaf ears. Maybe the Evil One blocks our ability to hear it in that moment. That's a good time when we should ask God to enlighten us to hear his word.

Or, perhaps we *hear* the message, we know what we *should* do, but we make all kinds of excuses for why we can't do God's work: “I'm too busy” “I have too much going on in my life to help out or go do this.” “I already made plans to do something else.” “I don't have time to stop and help this person in need, because I'm in a rush to get to where I'm going.” “I have plans for my life; I can't follow this path.” “I don't

have the energy to do that.” That’s when we’re being the seed sown among thorns: we hear the word, but the cares of the world, or the plans we’ve made for our lives, or our own human agendas can choke God’s purpose for us and it won’t happen.

And then there are those times—I know I’ve had them—when we get all “gung ho” about something that really excites us. We’re gonna change the world, we’re gonna start this project, we’re gonna do thus and so. And we start out doing it, but then it loses steam, it doesn’t go as smoothly as we had hoped, it requires more effort and time on my part than I had anticipated, I’m not feeling it anymore, or we just drift into doing something else. That’s when we’re being the seed that springs up quickly, but is scorched by the sun; the seed that has no root. That’s not always a bad place to be; maybe God needed us to move from one place to another so that our ultimate purpose might be fulfilled. We must always also be open to God’s direction, and even him taking us in directions we didn’t even expect. We may find ourselves following a calling or doing the thing that we thought God was asking us to do, but it may turn out different from the way we had first envisioned it or we may lose the passion. It may take on a new life or generate excitement in others that we did not expect. And that’s a good thing. *That* leads to seeds planted in fertile soil.

Because, every once in a while, we do it: we hear the God’s voice, we get the inspiration, and our efforts actually have a result or an effect that we can see! Those are the best seeds, when we are that seed that has been sown in good soil, we establish roots and nothing can stop us, and in the end, we sow seeds of our own. Think about when you plant something in the ground. It grows and bears fruit, but if you don’t pick the fruit, it will eventually fall off the plant and decay in the soil, but you know that the following spring, several new plants will pop up.

The point of all of this is that we must keep trying. Even if we give it a go and fail, we mustn’t give up. Each of us is called by God to be a disciple of Christ in a particular way, based on our own gifts, our own talents, our own passions. The things that motivate us, when we are listening for God’s voice and listening to it, are the ways in which God motivates us to be good disciples, both good shoots planted in good soil, and good sowers, planting seeds on fertile ground, but sometimes planting seeds on rocky soil. We don’t always know what fruit our seeds will bear. Have you ever come across a plant, or a bush, or a flower growing in a place you didn’t expect?

We must simply be the seed that God has sown and try to sow seeds of our own. The easiest way that we can do that is in the way we carry ourselves, in the way we conduct ourselves, in the way we show the world who we are. Anyone who is around young children will know that they are constantly watching our actions. They see the little things we do and they copy our behavior, so we should be mindful of the ways we behave. If they do something surprising and you say, “Where did they get that from?” Maybe take a look in the mirror; take a selfie video on your iPhone and you may find the answer. Not just little kids, but big kids as well. The way we conduct ourselves in our daily lives models what we carry in our hearts. Just like Paul said in today’s lesson

from his letter to the Romans, “Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on things of the Spirit.” If we stay focused on the lessons of Jesus Christ, we will keep our eyes focused on God and do the right thing. We can live a life of righteousness and be the seed planted in good soil and, God willing, we will sow lots of other seeds. Those seeds just might fall on fertile ground where others will be inspired and transformed.

The take-home message is that we simply sow the seeds. Put it out there. Take a leap of faith and try to be a good disciple. Let God be the guide to water you, make you sprout, so that like Isaiah said, you can be seed to the sower and bread to the eater. Be the seed that produces a harvest beyond your wildest dreams. Amen.

Resources

Elizabeth Johnson, “Commentary on Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23” in *The Working Preacher*, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=978.

David Ewart, “Understanding the Bible in its own time and in ours” in *Holy Textures*, <http://www.holytextures.com/2011/05/matthew-13-1-9-18-23-year-a-pentecost-july-10-july-16-proper-10-ordinary-15.html>.