

# Seed, Soil, and the Kingdom of Heaven

## I. Introduction

- Today we step into that part of Matthew's telling of the Jesus story in which Jesus is teaching through parables (7 in chapter 13 alone!).
  - "Parable" is a word that means putting one thing alongside another as a way of explaining the other.
  - Images and metaphors are used in parables as a way of unpacking something that's hard to understand.
  - But they have limits; no parable can contain the whole thing that it is trying to illustrate.
- The value of teaching with parables though is that parables can get us thinking in new ways about complicated stuff.
  - So I am going to begin today with an invitation:
  - I invite you to be open to thinking about how you hear Jesus' words
    - and how you share them with others.
  - In fact, you may even want to sit with your hands open in your lap during this sermon to symbolize this open posture.
    - Maybe today will be a day when you gain a new insight
      - into what it means to follow Jesus and
      - share the kingdom of heaven with a broken world.

## II. Hearing the Word

- First, we experience this parable as people who hear the word of God;
  - we are the ones in the parable who receive the seed from the sower.
- At times, we are like the soil of the path – hard-packed and unreceptive.
  - God's Word cannot find a place to take root and grow and produce fruit.
  - Maybe we've been blindsided by a tragic loss to the point that we are hardened to a word of grace and hope.
    - Maybe we've been paralyzed by a whole series of disruptions, one after another, to the point that life seems like it's out of control.
  - It may even feel like the God who is speaking this word is absent and could not care less about our problems and predicaments.
- At other times, we are like the rocky ground where the soil is thin.

- The Word we hear takes hold and shows promise of producing fruit,
  - but the depth of our relationship with Jesus is insufficient to sustain a budding faith.
- It's not a 24/7, all-in kind of faith but more like a once-a-month when-I-think-of-it kind of faith.
- At other times, we are like the thorny soil where the weeds are so thick
  - that any faith we may have is choked out by everything else that's a part of our lives.
  - We're over-scheduled and sleep-deprived.
  - We eat poorly, we're addicted to our devices, we harbor resentments and hang on to prejudices,
    - and we dabble in things that do not promote the abundant life God wants for us.
- Even so, there are also times when the soil of our lives is rich and fertile,
  - and we openly receive God's Word as the gift that it is,
    - and we are transformed by it,
    - and we choose to live our lives in ways that end up producing the fruits of the kingdom of heaven to the glory of God.
- At this level, the parable Jesus tells teaches us that following Jesus is first and foremost about listening,
  - listening deeply, with an ear that longs for understanding,
  - listening with the expectation that we will be given a word unlike any other word,
    - a word that will save us from sin and death,
    - a word that will transform us into people
      - who share that life-giving word with the world eagerly, freely, and lovingly.
- Which brings us to the second way we experience Jesus' parable.

### **III. Proclaiming the Word**

- We also experience Jesus' parable as people who are called to scatter the seed of God's Word;
  - we are the means through which the world hears the Good News.
- And this parable teaches us that we may never know how that word will be received.

- Some will fall on the path; some will fall on rocky soil; some will fall among the weeds; and some will fall on good, fertile soil.
- For roughly 75% of the time, our proclamation, our witness, our testimony will not produce the desired outcome –
  - that others will come to know the depth of God’s love for them; they’re just not ready for it.
- Still we sow the seed anyway, broadcasting it far and wide
  - because the rest of the time, the other 25% or so, our proclamation, our witness, our testimony will bear fruit – a miracle of transformation –
    - clear evidence that God is at work through the power of God’s Word healing and blessing all of creation.
- BUT – and this is the kicker – HOW we share the Good News matters.
  - If I have learned anything at all these past several years
    - as I have taken a deep dive into the reality of systemic racism in our country and in our church, it is precisely this:
      - how we tell the story matters.
- For example, our Lakota neighbors may just be some of the most over-evangelized people in the world.
  - The church has been trying to convert them for over 500 years.
  - Yet to this day, the fruit of that proclamation is paltry at best.
- Before we point a finger in judgment though, let’s remember that we – the Christian church, followers of the crucified Lord Jesus –
  - we have come to them and devalued them as human beings.
- We have told them from within our white Christian privilege that they must become like us.
  - They must live in houses like us and farm the land like us.
  - They must cut their hair like us and hold down jobs like us.
  - They must wear the same kind of clothes as us and speak the same language as us.
  - And, of course, they must believe like us.
  - If they don’t, they’ll go to hell;
    - if they don’t assimilate, they will lose their freedom to live as the people God created them to be – that’s been our message.
  - Is that what Jesus taught?
  - Is that why he died a brutal death on the cross?

- Is it any wonder that almost every Christian church on any reservation in South Dakota is about as relevant as an umbrella in a hurricane?
- HOW we tell this story that is transforming all of creation matters.
  - In fact, even before we open our mouths, maybe we need to open our hearts to the hard work of repentance.

#### IV. Conclusion

- Parables are a gift but not easily understood.
  - There will be times when you hear them as God's Word yet they will make no sense at all.
  - There will be times when a word from God will cause you to question what you believe, what you have learned.
  - There will be times when what you hear all around you will make *more* sense than God's Word.
- But there will also be times when everything will seem to come together,
  - when the word will seem clear to both the hearer and the speaker,
  - when what you've heard from God and about God will strike a chord of truth,
  - when the experiences of your life will align and the community you're a part of will offer its affirmation,
  - so that somehow, if only by the grace of God, there will be a fruit that is produced within you that will bless you and those around you,
    - a fruit that will point to a God whose welcome to sinners is wide and who is even now reconciling all of creation.
- Let anyone with ears listen.
- Amen.