**Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (ESV)**

[1] That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. [2] And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. [3] And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. [4] And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. [5] Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, [6] but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. [7] Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. [8] Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. [9] He who has ears, let him hear."

[18] "Hear then the parable of the sower: [19] When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. [20] As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, [21] yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. [22] As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. [23] As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

**“Generous Planting”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. In many ways, feedback has become a foundation for our society. Raise your hand if have ever taken a survey, been part of a census, answered a poll, or filled out a questionnaire. Collecting data from people has only increased with the rapid growth of communication. Feedback goes from a person standing with a clipboard asking questions to product review ratings while shopping online. The saturation of life with surveys has led some to offer a free prize, a gift of money, or a lottery just to get your feedback. Is the opinion of a person always going to be truthful when responding to questions? Is it possible to manipulate a survey so a business, government, school, or church can justify their actions?

 How fortunate that the Gospel does not take into account man’s feedback on what God does by grace for sinners. Instead, Jesus tells us the parable of the sower and seed. He gives His own feedback to how people will react to Him as Savior. Since we shorten the reading of Scripture texts during worship, it is easy to miss important distinctions. Jesus preached the parable to the crowd, but He explained the meaning only later when His disciples asked Him. They were the good soil baptized with the saving Name of God already in their lives. In preparation for preaching the Gospel, the disciples had to trust Christ more than feedback from sinful human beings. The parable does not question the sower and his seed, but the condition of the soil. No matter the reactions, God’s Word always serves the purpose to save people by the Savior Jesus.

 As the first parable spoken by Jesus, it holds great value. He sets the tone in words of God’s love that foolishly farms everything. There was no skimping on the seed nor taking shortcuts for this sower. Unlike our limited resources, God’s saving Word is an endless supply of life. Yet, the truth remained that seed falling on the path was never going to produce. There was no chance for it ever to go to work in the ground. Jesus said, “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.” The problem is not with God, but with what is going on in this world. Standing against the Gospel is the hunger of the devil. He is always more than ready to take away the good news of Jesus. As St. John later wrote, “We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). No amount of seed works on a hard path for that person has no room to understand the Gospel. The Devil already has them.

 In our survey driven society, Christians are susceptible to wondering over God’s Word when the issue is really with people. Churches wrongly end up questioning the sower and his seed. Yet, the hard path of a person is what constantly falls prey to the Devil. They have no time to understand the truth nor do they take what Jesus says seriously. However, understanding the Gospel is the easiest gift. So much so, we as Lutherans rejoice that even a baby has this seed of salvation at baptism. Martin Luther declares,

“For man’s failure to grasp God’s words does not spring from weakness of understanding...for it was for the weak and to the weak that Christ came, and to them that He sends His Word. No, the cause is the wickedness of Satan, who is enthroned and reigns over us in our weakness, and who himself resists the Word of God. If Satan did not do so, the whole world could be converted by a single word of God, heard once; there would be no need of more” (The Bondage Of The Will 133-134)

The hardness of men’s heart is like hard ground unbroken by the Law. How quickly the Devil snatches up God’s love by the Gospel. He devours the forgiveness of sins in Christ giving excuses to sinners. He takes away the truth leaving lies so the soil simply is empty with death.

 No matter the reactions, God’s Word always serves the purpose to save people by the Savior Jesus. Outside of the hard path, the majority of soil did receive the seed by the sower. Unlike the Pharisees or Roman officials, many people did hear Christ proclaim His saving Word and believed in Him. The disciples witnessed this when the crowd heard Jesus preach His first parable. Yet, they learned only good soil was deep and cleared from clutter. Crowds came quickly but turned away just as fast when Christ stopped with the miracles. Later Jesus asked His disciples, “Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God “(John 6:67-69). At the same time, the disciples also stumbled over the truth of how shallow their faith in Jesus as Savior was when facing His death on the Cross.

 A survey can tell us the popularity of Christ, but it cannot go deeper into a person’s life. Just because the seed is in the ground does not mean it can produce. Time will tell. Plenty go to baptism out of guilt for fulfilling family tradition never to return. Plenty claim Christ only to choke out His Word with other glories in life. Plenty wither away when celebrating Christ turns to carrying a cross. As. St. Paul said, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!” This right to cry out to God is for the baptized in a world of sin, death and the Devil. Yet, since the time of Constantine and legalization of Christianity as a religion, it has become easier to be comfortable in our worldly surroundings.[[1]](#footnote-1) Consumer Christians leave churches to shop for something more when forgiveness in Jesus is why the Father sent His Son. The cross offends the comfortable, but Jesus promises is to drive deep roots of His victory into our life.

 No matter the reactions, God’s Word always serves the purpose to save people by the Savior Jesus. The disciples did not choose to be the good soil. None can do this by their strength. It comes by a gracious work of God. The Holy Spirit, “opens the intellect and the heart to understand the Scriptures and to heed the Word…” (Tappert 526:26). So it is for anyone who continues to be broken soil and remains with Christ’s Word at work in their life. He said, “As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” What a single seed produces overflows with value. It is not for the baptized to fight over the yields. Rather, the glory is that the seed does bring forth fruit in the right soil.

Jesus did not harden His heart as God’s Son to love sinners. Nor did He hide from being the suffering savior. He proved the Word in His life brought forth the greatest fruit with victory over the cross. So too, Christ continues fruitful work in our lives so the seed of salvation falls upon others in the world. He is careless with spreading the Gospel whatever the outcome, just as He keeps us as the good soil by His Spirit working in the Word and Sacrament. The sower needs no survey from sinful people. Results have already come forth by Jesus’ death and resurrection. His seed is not the problem only a promise. It justifies the soil by the life Jesus gives of forgiveness, fruitfulness, and faithfulness that abounds for sinners. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.

1. David P. Scaer, Discourses in Matthew 305 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)