

October 21, 2018
Mark 4:2-9; 13-20.

Good news: Very generous sower

⁴ He said many things to them in parables. While teaching them, he said, ³“Listen to this! A farmer went out to scatter seed. ⁴ As he was scattering seed, some fell on the path; and the birds came and ate it. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground where the soil was shallow. They sprouted immediately because the soil wasn’t deep. ⁶ When the sun came up, it scorched the plants; and they dried up because they had no roots. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorny plants. The thorny plants grew and choked the seeds, and they produced nothing. ⁸ Other seed fell into good soil and bore fruit. Upon growing and increasing, the seed produced in one case a yield of thirty to one, in another case a yield of sixty to one, and in another case a yield of one hundred to one.” ⁹ He said, “Whoever has ears to listen should pay attention!”

¹³“Don’t you understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴ The farmer scatters the word. ¹⁵ This is the meaning of the seed that fell on the path: When the word is scattered and people hear it, right away Satan comes and steals the word that was planted in them. ¹⁶ Here’s the meaning of the seed that fell on rocky ground: When people hear the word, they immediately receive it joyfully. ¹⁷ Because they have no roots, they last for only a little while. When they experience distress or abuse because of the word, they immediately fall away. ¹⁸ Others are like the seed scattered among the thorny plants. These are the ones who have heard the word; ¹⁹ but the worries of this life, the false appeal of wealth, and the desire for more things break in and choke the word, and it bears no fruit. ²⁰ The seed scattered on good soil are those who hear the word and embrace it. They bear fruit, in one case a yield of thirty to one, in another case sixty to one, and in another case one hundred to one.”



While I was studying this very well-known passage I heard the president of Asbury Seminary preaching and he started his sermon with the following illustration:

Imagine a painter who comes to your home and starts to paint your wall, but he is so generous with his paint that the paint goes onto your carpet. He dips his brush generously in the paint and paint goes, not only on to your wall, but also on your TV and furniture. The paint is everywhere and, praise God, there is some on the walls, too. Isn't that a great image? I can see how I would not be so happy about that painter. I would be displeased that he does not know what he is doing. He is ruining my house and wasting the paint.

I think some of you can predict, what kind of sermon this will be. In our familiarity it is sometimes harder to hear. Let's try and see if we can encounter this parable of Jesus with new insight.



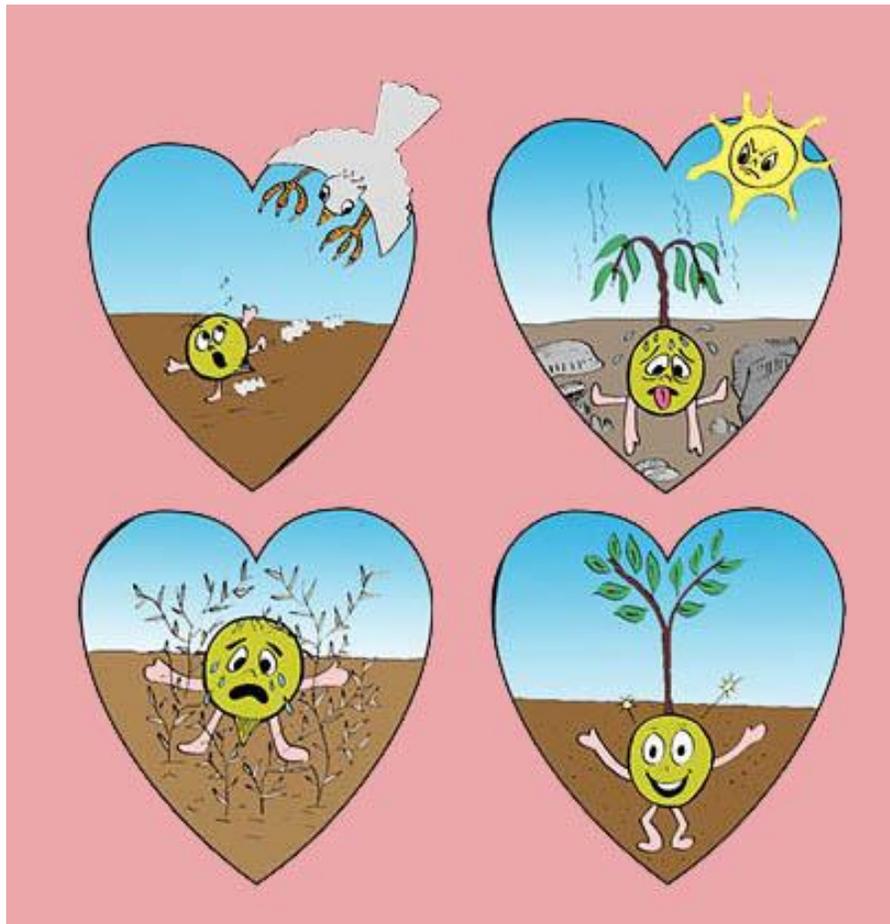
First of all, this story is about the sower. Isn't it? The name is "The Parable of the Sower" – not "The Parable of the Soil". What does it tell us about the sower? He is a crazy farmer. None-the-less He is the Farmer. Could it possibly be that he is not so foolish after all. As we heard last Sunday, Jesus' family thought He was off his rocker. But was He? Jesus is the one who knows how to do it. If he knows what he doing, why does he do it in such an inept fashion? Why does He sow in places like rocks or on a path? Even a non-farmer city woman like me knows that you do not sow seeds on pavement or the sidewalk? Why throw the seeds away? Wouldn't that be the same question as why does the sun come up over the good and bad? Why do mean people do so well and godly people seem to suffer?

An old German question is, "Why do the worst farmers always grow the best potatoes?"

Psalms 10 is a cry to God. "Why to the heathen prosper?"

Why should we love those who are being cruel and hateful? Why waste my time, my heart, my resources on these people? It is not worth it.

A few answers come to my mind. One, there are so many seeds that there is enough – actually more than enough to bring a harvest. Maybe it is not about how much seed, but about continuing to sow? Second, we do not know the soil. Only God knows the hearts of individuals.



The predicted sermon about this parable would be to talk about you and me and about what kind of heart you and I have. Right? I would talk about the path. Is your heart so closed? Are you unteachable? Are you deaf to the words of God? You hear

but you cannot listen. Somebody makes a noise but you do not understand. The word of God does not touch your heart. You might think it is not about me, but this guy behind me or this girl in front of me. It is quite easy to spot the hardness in someone else's heart.

Next, I would preach about the rocky soil. You hear it and you get kind of excited about what you hear. As soon as you leave the church door it is all gone. It is in the past. Life goes on and has nothing to do with the Word we hear. Many know the Bible forward and backward and inside out but before long they burnout or ignore what it is teaching. Too often we do not develop the root and we burn up in the heat.

Then there is a third kind of soil, the soil with the weeds. People who hear the word, but they have so many worries, cares and diversions that, though they have good intentions and good hearts, life just gets in the way. Before long it becomes it impossible to live the holy life as a true disciple. Jesus said, "Other seed fell among thorny plants. The thorny plants grew and choked the seeds, and they produced nothing." Worries, problems, destructive habits, cell phones, video games, personal relationships, politics, sin all choke out what the Holy Spirit is saying to you.

Finally, there is a fourth type of soil which is the best. "Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!" Wow! I would like to think it could be me. Maybe I might bring at least a 30% increase.

But what I would like us to hear today and the way I read this parable is this. **I am**



all four of these soils.

Yes, I am. Sometimes I am the one who hears but I do not comprehend. Sometimes I listen to a devotion or I read. Ask me a question afterwards. I cannot say a thing.

I remember very well the first Bible study I led in Lithuania. I was trying to get to know the people so I asked: "Tell me the best sermon you ever heard. What was one of the most memorable sermons you have heard. It could be from last Sunday or it could be 10 years ago. What do you remember?"

I should not have asked. One lady said, "Yes, I have heard a very good sermon. It was a very good sermon, indeed. I remember thinking that how good it was but I cannot tell you a single word of what was it about. Nobody, not even one person, could tell me one sermon. So I do not dare to ask that question again. To tell the truth, I don't remember many of my own sermons.

I think we all have these moments, hours or even days, when we are not able to hear. Most likely it has nothing to do with the sower or with the seed. For whatever reason our hearts are hard.

Other times I get all excited about what I hear or learn. I grow quickly but fail to maintain the spiritual disciplines which help grow the root. "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer." Prayer, fasting, studying the Bible privately and in a group, worship are all ways to train and intentionally apply what we learn about God so that we have roots that enable us to withstand the scorching heat of life. We hear it. We like it. It will not last if there is no depth.

The advertising for Christmas has already started. How hard it is to not to go with the flow. Everything screams for you to spend your money here. Get the best here. Spend your time here. We have all you need. Eat here, live here, be here, visit here. Everybody has the best rates, the best qualities, the best... Really? How long do we need to live to realize that it is not what you and I need?

The second stanza of "Fill My Cup, Lord" says it so well:

*There are millions in this world who are seeking
For pleasures earthly goods afford.
But none can match the wondrous treasure
That I find in Jesus Christ my Lord.*

Philippians 4:19: "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus". We say, "Amen", until we get to the real struggles of life, real needs and we decide there are too many thorns and they are too sharp. We die. I die. I bring no fruit.

Praise God for those times when we get some paint on the wall. Praise God, we sometimes bring fruit. Sometimes we see the need. Sometimes we are not thinking about me first. Sometimes we share, not from our abundance, but from what we also need. Sometimes we share our faith, even when we do not feel like it. Sometimes we talk about Jesus with the people who are very important to us and may will not like us afterwards. Sometimes we even pray instead of gossiping. Sometimes we forgive. We all bring fruit some days. We get it right occasionally.

Let's come back to the Sower. Yes, think again, of the love he has for you and me. It does not matter what kind of soil you are today. God knows. God is not saying, "Those, who have a hard heart like a path, stay in the right back corner. Those of you, who have a little space in your heart for my word, come in the left back corner. All those

of you, who really want to try and do the best, stand in the front right corner. Those who will follow me, all those who are serious about loving me, following me and staying faithful to me, who will be my disciple and will be ready to give their life, - stand in the left front corner. Be ready, I will sow only in this left front corner. I will put my seeds only into this good soil.”

God is not like this. He sows on all hearts, you do not have to be ready or special. Today the seeds are planted. Today God’s word is proclaimed to all. Praise be to God.



Did the Sower had such an enormously large basket that he could put so many seeds in it? Did he have to go back and refill? Maybe the seeds multiply every time he sows like the loaves and fish multiplied.

Wow! What a thought! Every time he throws the seed, it does not matter what soil it lands on, it will multiply for more. I love this image because it is an example for me

and you. Every time we give of our time, talents and treasure because of our love of God we will have enough for more. It is not a prosperity gospel, but it is always enough to give because of our faith. I need to grow. Yes, I have long ways to go to learn to be such an extravagant sower with all that I have, with my words, with my actions, time and money. But I am excited that God is still sowing and He is still giving me a chance to be good soil.

God indeed is like that extravagant painter. God is splashing His amazing grace everywhere. We might not like it because it can get messy. God has so much paint to spare and God wants to paint everything with his colorful grace covering all the darkness, dreariness and sin.

We are reminded every time we look at the cross. The infinite love of God compelled God to send his Son into the world to suffer, die and rise again from the dead. God is painting God's mercy, justice, love and grace on everything – not just the walls. God's paint can will never run dry.

*Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus,
Deeper than the mighty rolling sea;
Higher than the mountain, sparkling like a fountain,
All-sufficient grace for even me!*

No matter the state of our hearts, whether it is hardened, or without roots, or choked, or productive, God is always, generously and abundantly, lavishing his grace even on you and me.