

**Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – August 3, 2014**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

**Matthew 13:1-9**

**3) Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4) As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5) Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.**

**6) But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7) Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8) Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9) Whoever has ears, let them hear."**

Dear Friends in Christ:

I've often thought about planting a Hydrangea plant – some people call them Mopheads. As you can see from the pictures they are quite pretty. They can be used nicely as a single plant or planted in mass for a hedge or a border. But I've always been a bit leery about planting them because like any number of plants they require the proper kind of soil to produce those lovely colorful blossoms. According to one gardening expert this is what you need to do.



Hydrangeas grow best in partial shade to full sun. They prefer morning sun and afternoon shade, especially in hot areas Hydrangeas need a lot of water. In fact the word "Hydrangea" comes from the Greek for "water tub"! They grow best in rich soil, so dig in a lot of compost, and other organic matter, when you plant them, and mulch well.

And here's a fun fact, you can change the color of the blossoms, by changing the acidity of the soil. Add Aluminum Sulfate to make the soil acid for Blue flowers. Or, add Lime to make the soil alkaline for Pink flowers. You will need to repeat the process 2 or 3 times over the growing season and continue it as long as you want the change to continue. It may take a year or two to see the results you want. This doesn't usually work on the white varieties on Hydrangeas.

All that talk about having just the right Ph content and soil richness and compost and organic matter and mulch have left me thinking that there's a pretty good chance I'd be disappointed if I did plant a hydrangia or two so I've never done it.

I wonder if some people don't feel that same way about planting the seed of the Gospel. They are afraid that they may not see the results that they would like to see so they don't do it. That's when it helps to remember that all the Lord asks us to do is plant the seed – share the Gospel – and leave the results to the Lord. Some will reject the gospel and in others faith will grow and bear abundant fruits of faith as Jesus' parable of the Sower and the Seed reminds us. And so it is appropriate for us to pray.

**Theme:** Lord, Make Our Hearts Good Soil for the Seed of the Gospel

1. So that we grow in faith
2. And sow in love

The reason for our prayer today is made clear by Jesus parable coupled with his own explanation of the parable. Jesus explanation of his parable reminds us of the numerous ways in which the Gospel can be undermined in our lives and so we pray Lord make our hearts good soil for the seed of the Gospel so that we grow in faith,

At the time of Jesus, planting a field did not involve large tractors or planting implements that covered dozens of rows in a pass. Instead, it involved a leather bag carried over the shoulder and filled with seed. The farmer would walk through the field and scatter the seeds over the ground, then plow them under afterward. Because of this, he could not control where each individual seed fell. It could fall in good ground where it would grow, but it might fall on the path worn in the field by travelers, or on the rocky, gravel-like ground, or be overcome by weeds and thorns.

Jesus uses these soils from our parable to describe the different results when the Word of God is preached. **Some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up... When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.**

If the sower scattered seed, and it landed on the path worn across the field by travelers, where the soil had been packed down, it would lie on top of the hardened ground, and the birds would eat the seed, preventing it from growing. Some people hear the Word of God preached and it's as if it just bounced off of them. They hear, but no faith is produced, and they are still lost.

Such a hard-hearted reception of the Gospel isn't limited to out and out believers and scoffers though. Even those who have been called to faith by the Gospel have remnants of hardened ground in their hearts. Recall the time Jesus questioned the believing 12 because they had missed the spiritual intent of his teaching. (Mark 8:17 NIV) **Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?"**

Or think of how Jesus admonished the Emmaus disciples on the afternoon of his resurrection. (Luke 24:25 NIV) **He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! We are not immune to such hardness of heart.**

Such hardness may very well affect our hearts. Sin, doubts and unbelief itself trample our hearts and threaten to prevent the plant of faith from growing. How necessary it is for us to seek the Lord's blessings that his Gospel would take root in our hearts so that we can grow in the faith and overcome sin, doubt and unbelief.

**Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6) But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.... The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21) But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.**

If the sower scattered the seed on ground that was rocky, similar to gravel, that seed would begin to grow, but in dry times or times of heat, it would die off because the soil was not deep enough for it to produce roots. This happens frequently in churches, and has sadly also happened in our congregation, where a person or family is drawn into the church, but for some reason they soon disappear and are also lost. They began in the faith, but for some reason or other, they leave behind the Church and the Christian faith. They were not rooted firmly enough in God's Word and Love. Jesus warning to each of us is clear: Plants of faith lacking roots will not survive. A shallow, short-lived reception of the word will not do in the long run.

The apostle Peter understood that this was a fairly common problem among Christians. That's why he urges, 1 Peter 2:2 (NIV) **Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.** In words that are familiar to our congregation the apostle Peter again offers us the reminder of our need for spiritual growth. 2 Peter 3:18 (NIV) **But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

Once again we will pray that the Lord will enable our hearts to be good soil so that we will continue to grow in faith. May we pray with Paul **that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith, that being rooted and established in love, 18) we may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.** (cf. Ephesians 3:17-18)

**Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants... The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.**

Like a seed that was planted, but later was choked out by thorns or weeds, many Christians who began in faithfulness forsake the faith later in their lives. They were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, participated in Sunday School, Christian Day School and confirmation classes. They were confirmed in the faith, but later, for one reason another--whether it was greed, or sin, or even the love of sleep, they begin to neglect the services of God's House, and eventually are not seen again and are lost as well. Ultimately the world and its attractions drew them away from the Lord.

Every farmer and gardener understands that the battle against weeds is an ongoing battle. Weeds drain strength from the good plants and can actually cause them to die. And so you and I need to pay attention the spiritual weeds which try to take over our hearts.

What are some of the weeds that can grow in the hearts of those who listen to God's word? Jesus spoke of the worry weed and the deceptive weed of wealth. The fast spreading "worry-thorn" was certainly alive and well in Martha's heart when Jesus came to her house. It robbed her of the opportunity to receive nourishment for her faith by causing her to neglect the one thing needed – hearing the word of her Lord.

How often don't our own worries threaten to take over our heart – distracting us as we try to listen to a sermon or study the word? Only God's promises in his word to take care of all our needs can uproot those worry weeds. May the Lord bless our study of his precious promises so that our hearts will be good soil for his Gospel seed and we will grow in faith!

**Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.... But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."**

In many cases the Gospel is lost forever but there are, however, others who are brought into the faith and remain faithful to Christ until the end. This indeed is a wonderful miracle of our God and surely it is our prayer that we might be numbered among those whose faith remains strong to the end.

One thing we see in all these soils--The soil can do nothing without the seed. We, in ourselves can do nothing to save ourselves. We cannot choose Christ; we cannot decide to follow Jesus. We cannot earn our salvation through works. We cannot even contribute to our salvation through works. God comes to us with the Gospel, and only after the Holy Spirit has given us faith through the Gospel are we saved.

This Gospel comes among us in many ways. The Sower Himself--God in the flesh—came to live among us and shared his teachings with us. God comes to us in His Word as it is read and preached in the Divine Service. Jesus is present among us in His Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper. He also comes to us with this Gospel through the words of our pastors, as Paul says,

1 Corinthians 3:5-9 (NIV) **What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe--as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6) I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. 7) So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8) The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. 9) For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.**

Additionally, he comes to us through the encouragement and counsel of other Christians. The parable says that when the seed is planted in good soil, it produces a harvest 30, 60, or 100 times what was sown. A normal harvest in Israel might have ranged from 8-30 times what was planted. The harvest Jesus speaks of here is greater than any earthly thing because it comes through His Gospel.

And so as we pray, Lord, Make Our Hearts Good Soil for the Seed of the Gospel so that we grow in faith we are asking that the Lord would enable us to produce fruits of faith that would lead to a wonderful harvest of souls for the Lord. And so we also pray that we would be enabled by the Lord to sow the seed joyfully: leaving the results to the Lord.

As Christians who have heard the Word, we cannot help but tell others of the Gospel of the God who has saved us. As Christians go out, they tell the Good News about Jesus and then bring more people to the services of God's House to hear this Gospel, and in this way Christ builds his Church of faithful believers.

In John's Gospel Jesus uses another image of a seed being planted. John 12:23-26 (NIV) **Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24) Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25) Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26) Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.**

Jesus speaks of himself as the grain of wheat which must fall to the ground and die in order to bear fruit. Jesus did fall to the earth and die. He was crucified to pay the price for all our sins on the cross. He was then buried like a seed is planted in the ground. Then, on the third day, he rose again from the dead. Like a grain of wheat grows a stalk and produces much fruit, Jesus rose from the dead and brought many to faith in himself. Because he died for our sins, the Father declares us to be righteous and keeps us as the good soil, bearing the fruit of faithfulness, and he promises to keep us in this One True Faith until we join Him in eternity to spend all time in the perfect mansions of the Father's House.

Jesus concluded his parable by saying: **Whoever has ears, let them hear.** It's not hard to determine if I have ears that work or not. If we have ears that work, Jesus tells us to use them. Hear and take to heart what I am teaching you – and the point that Jesus wants to drive home to us today is this: Listen to the Word of God with care and prayer so you may grow in faith and sow in love. **Whoever has ears, let them hear.** Amen.