

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

I wish, as I'm sure we all do, that this parable before us was not true...except for the last part. I wish...we wish that everyone who hears the Word of God is good soil. We do not want anyone to be the hardened path, or the rocky soil, or the soil in which there are thorns. This is too hard to accept - that some, perhaps many, or even most who hear the Word of the kingdom of Christ do not persevere in the Faith, but rather fall away.

But wishing does not make it so. There are four types of soil; four kinds of hearers. It is not for me, or for you, to guess which ones are represented here today. God knows even though we do not. If I thought I knew who of you is the good soil, I could dismiss the rest and preach only to those hearers who will produce the fruits of faith and persevere to the end.

But I would be a fool to attempt this. For soil can change over time. I have seen this, and so have you. Someone I would have dismissed years ago is today bearing fruit one hundred-fold. It brings tears of joy to my eyes and heart. And also someone I would not have dismissed before, has shown themselves to be not the good soil I thought them to be, and this brings to me tears of sadness.

It is not the sower's responsibility to sow the seed only where he thinks it will grow. The sower sows oblivious to where the seed falls. God's promise, spoken through the prophet Isaiah, must always be in front of him: *"My Word...shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."*

And so today the sower goes out to sow here in Christ Lutheran Church. He sows the seed of the Word, trusting in the promise of God, no matter what he sees with his eyes.

As much as this parable is for the one Jesus uses to sow the seed, it is even more for the ears of those who hear. It is for the soil upon which the seed is sown. Each one of us is to apply this parable to ourself. For if I begin to identify the bad soil around me, it will prevent me from seeing that which is hardened, rocky, and thorny within me.

That being said, someone who dismisses the Word of God altogether; who has little use for it and what it teaches, is most certainly the hardened path. God's Word goes in one ear and out the other. This person's heart has been hardened. And so the devil has an easy time of it plucking the Word away.

Rather than looking around the room, or through the church rolls, for that person, let me look inside myself. How often don't I dismiss the Word of God? How often don't I think little of what it teaches? Am I making it easy for the devil? Does that hardened path have a trail into my heart? If I am becoming this type of soil...this kind of hearer, may God, in mercy, work repentance in my heart.

The next two types of soil are the rocky ground and the ground that has thorns. These are the hearers who are affected by the bad things in life or by the good things in life. The person who has rocks in his soil will turn away from the Word when troubles come: marriage problems, problems with parents or with children, issues with the pastor or a church member, financial problems. The troubles in life which come to all, pull this person away from God's House and Word, instead of driving him or her more deeply into the Word.

Are these rocks in my heart? Am I being pulled away from the Word because of my problems, my anger, my worries? May God, in mercy, lead me to repentance and crush the rocks within my soil.

The person who has thorns in his soil is greatly affected by the cares and busyness of the world. Time becomes an issue. His priorities change. Making money becomes more important than the Word of God. Family comes first. Relationships are nurtured at the expense of being a faithful hearer of the Word. This kind of person does

not notice the thorns growing up within him. This hearer typically falls away slowly. The Word is gradually choked out, and so he does not even notice what is happening.

This thorny soil has a home in most every heart. I know it has one in mine. A gardener or farmer who ignores the thorns and thistles that grow up is a fool. What else can be said of the Christian who ignores the thorns in his own heart and life? May God, in mercy, lead us to repentance and do whatever it takes to remove the thorns from our soil.

The good soil is that hearer who does not fall away, but perseveres in the Faith because God's Word continues to grow within him to the very end. But friends, no one is born as good soil. "*There is no one who is good,*" the Bible says, "*no not one.*" You and I do not bring good soil to God; we bring bad soil, the soil we are born with. Nothing good could ever grow within us.

Jesus is the good soil. He is the only one who is good. And the day you were baptized He came into you, threw the devil out with his hardness, rocks, and thorns, and Jesus became the good soil in your heart. Jesus loves the seed of the Word of God. He loves to hear it though your ears. And He is the one who is growing within you, yielding thirty, sixty, or even one hundred-fold. "*It is not I who live,*" we say with St. Paul, "*but Christ who lives in me.*" Apart from Christ we are only rocks and thorns and a hardened path. But Jesus makes a difference in your heart and life.

He is the only one who can make this difference because of what He did for you already. He walked the hardened path to Golgotha. His feet felt the sharp rocks as He carried His cross. Upon His head thorns were placed. There is no soil He does not know. And there is no hearer, no sinner, with whom He does not identify.

He does not reject you for the hardness in your heart. He suffered and felt, for you, the hardness of God's anger. Jesus does not turn away from your rocks and thorns. He died for you and He buried those ugly rocks and thorns in His tomb. Your baptism seals them up away from your heart. Your baptism gives you a new heart; it gives you Christ's heart. He is now good soil in you. In Him you live, and move, and have your being. In Christ, who was raised for you, you are one in whom the seed of the Word grows.

And this is why your life is yielding good fruit. Some of you thirty-fold, some sixty, some one hundred-fold. Your singing and participating here in the Divine Service...your offerings...your witness to Christ...your love and kindness to others - Jesus is the good soil in you, and so these fruits are produced through you as the Word of God grows.

And the fruits you produce are not limited to your life span. Generations after you will yield such fruits. Good soil causes good soil in others. When God's Word is continually in your ears and heart, this living seed will produce a crop within those who come after you.

My friends, repent with me for the good crops we have failed to yield in the past. Repent with me for not being the good soil in which the seed can grow and mature. And trust me when I tell you that you are forgiven. God does not hold your past against you. He forgives your sin. For this purpose Jesus came - to wear your thorns, and to trod upon your rocks. No one here is without hope. No hardened path is too great for Him. No rocky or thorny heart too difficult. He died for every hearer of the Word. He is planting it within you today as His sower is sowing the seed here in Christ Lutheran Church.

Will it produce a crop within you? I pray it does. God's promise stands sure: "*My Word...shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*" Amen.