

You should not be here today. No, I am not speaking of the virus and sheltering at home. You should not be here listening with attentive ears to the seed of the Word. The odds are against it. Our world is filled with pecking birds, strangling thorns, and noxious weeds. What chance does the seed have with so many obstacles in the way? It is literally an impossibility for the seed of God's Word to grow and bear fruit in anyone of us. Without, that is, being snatched away, burnt to a crisp, or choked out.

So what does it mean that you are here, and here for the right reason? Or watching and listening at home, and again, for the right reason? The first line of our Introit for today explains it to us. "*The Lord is merciful and gracious.*" Look nowhere else for the answer. Why does the Word of the Lord take root and grow in spite of everything? It's because the Lord is merciful and gracious.

There was a man whose heart was like a hard path. When the seed fell on this path, it was immediately snatched away. But the Lord is merciful and gracious. In time the seed did take root in this man's heart. It grew and yielded fruit one hundred-fold. That man was the Apostle Paul.

There was a man whose heart was like rocky ground. The seed of the Word was growing in him. And when threats of persecution arose, the seed became scorched by that heat. But the Lord is merciful and gracious. He caused the seed in him to grow again and yield fruit, much fruit. That man was St. Peter.

There was a disciple of Jesus whose heart was like thorny ground. The seed grew, but so did the weeds and thorns. What happened to that seed? You tell me. That disciple is you, and it's me.

In some places the greatest danger to Christians is persecution on account of the Word. But not here. Where we live, the greatest danger is for the Word of God to be choked out by the *cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches*. We are busy people. We have things to do. Places to go, people to see. We work hard and we play hard. Such a lifestyle that we lead places us among the noxious weeds and thorns.

"Oh, but I would never lose my faith!" we say. Jesus does not mention faith in our text. It is not faith that is choked out; it's the Word of God.

The Word is everything. Without it there can be no faith, only head-knowledge which we think is faith, but it's not. Without the Word there is no Holy Spirit. Without the Word no repentance.

This is why the sower sows the seed of the Word again, and again, and again. He never ceases to sow the seed. If the sower knew it was an impossibility for the seed to grow in certain places, in certain people, would he avoid sowing the seed there? No! Because the sower knows the Lord is merciful and gracious. He does, what to us is impossible. He causes the seed of the Word to grow in spite of everything.

I am not going to stand up here today and tell you to stop being thorny soil and to start being good soil. Jesus does not say, "Let him who is rocky or thorny soil act to remove the rocks and thorns." He says, "*He who has ears, let him hear.*"

By hearing the seed of the Word again, and again, and again, the Holy Spirit works through that Word. He works repentance in our hearts. He gives us faith and keeps us in faith. This is how it is.

Jesus knows something about thorns. They were not growing in His heart. They were on His head as He was dying for you. Jesus knows something about persecution. He faced it all His life. And Jesus knows something about hardened paths. He dealt with such people in His ministry.

For all of these types of soil, Jesus went to the cross. He died for the most hardened sinners, and for those whose hearts and lives are filled with rocks and thistles.

I think you and I are afraid to admit that we are not the good soil we would like to think we are. Our hearts and lives have many weeds and thorns. But we compare ourselves to the hardened paths out there, and we look pretty good.

Jesus did not die for those who are good. He died for wretched sinners. Only God is good. And He is also merciful and gracious. He does not count the number of thorns in your heart. He cleanses your heart with the blood of Jesus Christ. He forgives you. He does not keep track of all the times you have closed your ears to Him. Rather, He opens His ears to Jesus who prayed for you on the cross, "*Father, forgive them.*"

Where is the good soil? I'm looking at it. Christ is the good soil. And He is in you, and you are in Him where you abide. This is what your baptism does for you. It declares to you that you are in Christ, the good soil.

This is why the seed of the Word grows in you. It's why the seed yields fruit in you. Because the Lord is merciful and gracious, He planted you in Jesus. He sows His seed, and He delights in bringing the seed into your ears and into your heart.

Never give up. We all have loved ones whose ears are not hearing right now. This parable does not teach us to give up on them. Just the opposite. It teaches us that the seed of the Word grows in spite of everything because the Lord is merciful and gracious. Amen.