

King of Glory Lutheran Church
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 “Listen Up, Listen In. God is Throwing”
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God's Word through God's grace will continue to be scattered upon us extravagantly. Our prayer as disciples is that our hearts be good soil to hear it. But we also trust that God makes our hearts into good soil as we ask in faith.

God's grace and peace to you, from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

For the next three weeks, we'll hear parables from Matthew's Gospel; we'll hear the sower and the seed, the wheat and weeds, the leavened bread, searching for the lost pearl and others. So just a few words about what a parable is and what we can expect of them. The Greek word for parable means: comparison. Para = beside, ballo = cast or throw; to throw alongside. Thus a parable is a story of comparisons. Parables often have a surprise element, a moment of shock or absurdity that defies logic, but there we find theology.

So from the lesson for today, it appears the sower of the seed is very indiscriminant about where the seed lands! He doesn't care seed falls on rocky soil. Or the shepherd goes after the one lost sheep, leaving the 99 in the field. Even to us, non-shepherd types, this doesn't seem very smart. Sometimes Jesus tells a parable to illustrate the upcoming responses of people. And because these are stories, there can be multiple readings and interpretations of parables.

Parables tell us something about the character and nature of God or the Gospel. But not every parable answers all the questions. Perhaps we could think about them like photographs of the family reunion. A snapshot of Grampa and little Billy making ice cream sundaes tell a story about love and connection between generations. But there is also another picture of Aunt Susie wringing her hands while sharing with Aunt Beth the troubles of young teenage Melissa, now pregnant out of wedlock. Both pictures tell us something about this family, but not one picture tells the whole story of the family reunion. Parables are like that.

In the parable of the sower and the seed, God or Jesus scatters seed indiscriminately on all types of soil. It falls on rocky soil, open hard soil, thorny soil and good soil. Seed in ancient times was expensive. People hearing this story would have been surprised even shocked that Jesus tells the story in this way.

Why waste good seed? You wouldn't want it to go anywhere but in the soil that would most likely produce a crop. Ask Susan Chamberlin or Sally and Don Specht or any of the Glory Garden gardeners. They do everything possible to prepare the garden beds with good dirt and fertilizer so that when the seeds go in, they take root. To waste seed defies common logic, even for we non-grower types.

Later when Jesus is talking only to the disciples, He tells them, that seed, is God's Word. I'd like to try something with you. I'm going to come out of the pulpit, but I'll come back in a few minutes. I don't want to distract you from listening to God's Word. Listen and notice what you are thinking or feeling about these passages. Let all of us who have ears, listen!

Psalm 23: 1-4 ¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; ³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Matthew 25:43, 45 God will say, "I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing sick and in prison and you did not visit me...just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."

Leviticus 25:47-48

⁴⁷If resident aliens among you prosper, and if any of your kin fall into difficulty with one of them and sell themselves to an alien, or to a branch of the alien's family, ⁴⁸after they have sold themselves they shall have the right of redemption; one of their brothers may redeem them,

Galatians 5:22-23, 26

²²By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

Illinois officials remain on high alert, following the discovery of an Asian carp caught in late June on the wrong side of electric barriers built near Chicago to keep the invasive species from entering Lake Michigan.

By tracing where this single carp had lived, researchers hope to prove whether the fish breached a series of three barriers used to block the species from entering the Great Lakes. The carp, which can grow up to 110 pounds and eat 20 percent of their weight every day, have spread up the Mississippi River and other Midwest waterways over the last several decades.

(<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/pressure-mounts-release-federal-report-discovery-asian-carp/>)

Romans 8:38-39 ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let us who have ears, listen! What was that like to hear God's word? Did you find you had a variety of responses to different passages? Were some of them easier to listen to than others? Did Psalm 23: "the Lord is my shepherd," take you to a memory in your head or in your heart? Perhaps you learned it in Sunday school as a child, or it was read at your mother's funeral? Hearing that scripture might have felt like words falling on good soil in your spirit.

The Matthew passage about not welcoming the stranger or caring for the sick calls out our sin. Do we allow God to convict us? Do we hear God's Law and let it move us to repentance and action?

How about the passage from Leviticus? Most of us cannot relate to selling ourselves to the resident aliens in the land. We are tempted to say, "God that just doesn't make sense!" It's a passage that might have felt like rocky soil – you needed much more information about the Levitical laws to understand this one! Did it feel like seed falling on thorns?

How about when I read the news piece about the carp in Michigan? Did it seem like a shock after expecting to hear just Bible passages? Do you ever wonder how God's word interacts with the news of the world happening all around us? Even if we feel or think or sense we've heard God speak through God's word, do we ever question what we once thought was foundational to our faith when held up next to the reality we see out our windows or what we read in the newspaper? We question what God's word can really do?

Hearing God's word; listening to it, studying it, taking it into our hearts is a process. Listening isn't just a one-time event, it is an ongoing activity. This activity is God produced. Isaiah promises that God's word will not return to us empty! God throws the seeds of God's Word over and over again. God doesn't care if it falls on hard soil, beaten down soil, tired soil, or good soil.

There was a man whose wife was in the hospital with multiple medical issues. It was serious and tense. He said to me, "I've been sitting here, trying to pray and trying to find something in my Bible to read. Can you give me some Bible passages to read?" On a scrap of paper, I wrote down about 10 passages that I thought would give him hope and direction in the midst of this health scare.

Now this man and his wife were in church every Sunday. They were faithful members and faithful in their worship life. They'd taken a Bible study courses. All throughout those years of their married life, all those hours sitting in worship listening to God's word, God had been scattering seeds. Throwing them gently out upon their hearts and minds. Week after week, Sunday after Sunday. "Here, my children, here's some seeds. Hear my words, know my love and grace." Tossing, tossing, tossing.

It wasn't as if they hadn't heard God's word. They believed in God. They loved Jesus. They contributed in meaningful ways to the congregation's life and ministry as regular and faithful volunteers. I would never have said their spiritual soil was hard or thorny or rocky. God's Word was in their hearts and taking root.

But for some reason, perhaps an extra push of the Holy Spirit, at that moment, the husband knew he needed more than what his own mind and heart contained. He needed some new seeds; he was calling out to the sower for help. And the sower answered.

His wife recovered and what followed was an amazing transformation of this man's heart. He began reading the Bible; opening up the pages and opening up his heart to God's word. His volunteer activities at church didn't change, he was still as faithful as ever. What changed was his response to God's word. God was still throwing seeds, and they began to bear fruit in new ways. His eyes lit up as he told me what he felt when he prayed or what God had revealed to him in his daily reading. He was excited to read and discover the contexts of the Old Testament; the peoples and their perils living as God's chosen ones. He began reading other theologians and authors. It wasn't just a 30 fold yield, it was 60, and 90 and 100 fold.

Our prayer as faithful disciples is to pray, “Lord, let my heart be good soil.” What we are called to remember is that God will keep throwing seeds – over and over and over again. We open our Bibles. We listen, we listen, over and over again. We hear the Word and we respond to God’s word. We read the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. We think critically using our best logic and theology.

Just remember, God prepares our hearts. God prepares the dirt. God knows we might go through seasons of drought or distance. There is grace upon grace. There are seeds of love waiting to be received and accepted falling upon us even now. There is a loving sower throwing seed from dawn until dusk. Let anyone with ears to hear, keep listening!
Amen.