

Let our Hearts be Good Soil

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Year A: Matthew 13:1-9, 28-30

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Lord let my heart be good soil, open to the seed of your Word, Lord let my heart be good soil, where love is grown and peace is understood... Lord let my heart be good soil. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship #512)

Understanding God's Word takes thought and work, patience and practice. The Holy Scriptures give us God's vision for God's kingdom. We can help God's Kingdom come on earth like seeds scattered on the ground. Lord let our hearts be good soil

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 ¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!"

¹⁸"Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

When I was growing up in Wyoming, the growing season wasn't very long. Bedded in between the seasons of road construction and Cheyenne Frontier Days, was about 5 and $\frac{3}{4}$ days of growing season. Now I jest...but truly...between high plains wind, late summer tornadoes and early frosts, we felt lucky to get any zucchini or rhubarb out of our garden.

But every year....every year...my sister and I helped Dad plant a large vegetable garden. Dad didn't grow up on a farm, but God must have put several chains of FARM into his DNA, because boy did he love that garden.

At the beginning of the season, my sister and I got excited to be out there with him just because he got so excited! Some seeds were the size of a lima bean and needed to be pushed down into the darkness with one finger. Other seeds were teeny tiny and needed to be shaken into long slender rows and then covered back up with a blanket of dirt. Now, planting...that was the fun part!

But in mid-July when Dad told us to go and weed the garden and it took the better part of an afternoon in the hot sun....let's say our enthusiasm for the sport of 'gardening' waned quickly.

Yet...when we finally sank our teeth into a freshly grown tomato, green bean or slice of Mom's sweet rhubarb pie, and then sis and I could understand why Dad got so excited about the garden. The whole picture was in sight....or rather in our stomachs!

Jesus was excited too! He was excited about the whole vision of God's coming Kingdom. So he told people this story. A sower goes out to sow....

God as a sower was not a new idea for the people listening. Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah long told of God planting and then gathering a harvest freeing God's people from sin and exile and oppression. Faithful people had waited generations upon generations for the Creator to act and extract them from their enemies.

The difference on this day was who was telling the story! It was a rabbi doing amazing miracles and boldly teaching new ideas. Those on the shore were eager to hear what Jesus might say. Did His presence mean that judgment was near? Would they be enlisted to help? Was now finally the time to call for arms and insurrection? (NT Wright. Matthew for Everyone. Westminster, John Knox Press. Louisville, Kentucky. Pg 157, 165.)

What would Jesus say? He said, “Anyone with ears listen.”

The challenge for the people listening that day, was this. Like my sister and me, they couldn't see the whole picture from seed packets to dinner table. As they listened, they expected a fiery vision of justice, led by a more fiery God chosen individual for a sweeping crusade that would provide God's people the freedoms they so longed for.

Jesus' parable talked about seeds being eaten by birds. Seeds dying in the hot sun? Seeds being crowded out by thorns? What kind of message was this? It surely sounded like failure in the dirty darkness rather than a victory of God's valiant.

What to do? It was common in story parables for a rabbi to include multiple points of interpretation. The birds get fed...that's great. Rocks are part of any field. Perhaps the sower didn't know they were just under the surface. It's easy to imagine the good soil...rich and dark, full of minerals ideal for growth. But the loss of $\frac{3}{4}$ of the crop either by design or chance?

The Bible isn't always the easiest to understand! There can be multiple interpretations of passages! Yet we have this gift of Life in God's Holy Word which narrates the whole picture of God's plan. God the sower has given us the Bible to encourage us, grow us, weed out the thorny dead places in our spirits. When we read and wrestle, pray and ponder, our hearts grow becoming good soil for God to use.

Many people were now hearing Jesus' vision of God's kingdom. Jesus knew enough that for some, the evil one would come and snatch away their understanding. For others, initially they might be excited and get involved, but they'd never follow Him to Golgotha hill. For yet others, the pull of the world would just be too strong. (Ibid. Pg 165)

But, for some, for a few perhaps, the soil of their hearts would be rich and ready to receive God's new seeds of love, mercy, grace and forgiveness.

Right now, there are many people who find their lives in seemingly “dead-ends” before Jesus even passes by with his planting bag of seeds. Essential workers are sick and without insurance. Refugees from man-made wars live in camps with no medicine or doctors or personal protective equipment. Students don't have access to laptops for learning because there isn't enough money for bills, let alone

computers or internet access. They are seeds on the beaten path: worn down, trodden upon, not noticed and thrown out to waste.

Others social distance in luxurious homes with pools, golf carts, fancy cars and even TV cameras, posting on Facebook their challenges. Jesus sounds good, even enchanting somehow, but life is just too lovely to turn the other cheek or open the checkbook. It would be work to pull the weeds and move the rocks. That's what the staff is for, right? They keep the gardens....someone else will water the seeds.

Others who have ears to hear, say again and again to God, "Lord, let my heart be good soil. Open my ears to hear you speak. Open my hands that I can be your hands. Open my mind to understand your Word. Open my spirit to your will and your ways. Lord, let my heart be good soil, that I can help in any way possible your children, so your kingdom come on earth. May your joy, Lord, be my joy. Your pain is my pain. Your hope is my hope. Because it says, O God in your sacred Word, that 'one doesn't live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' (Mt 4:4)'

In the midst of this pandemic, we are now confronted again with racism – a fault line exposed running all the way through the field. Even as we try to protect one another from getting sick, it seems as if the very thorns are fighting each other, throwing rocks and spraying poisonous words enough to kill all the seeds, all the weeds and crops too.

We need God's Word more than ever to keep our eyes stayed on the larger picture, the bigger narrative; love and grace for all! For within God's garden grow diverse plants: there is zucchini and rhubarb, beans and lettuce, tomatoes, corn, radishes and beets too! One crop wouldn't sustain nor be healthy for a diet. We need vegetables, grains and fruits. From the Creator's diversity all are well fed.

The same is true for the Bible. We need the Old Testament to correctly interpret the New Testament. If we only read Psalms, we wouldn't hear or heed the Prophets warnings. If we only read from the Prophets, we wouldn't hear God's grace in Jesus. Without the garden in Genesis, the garden in Revelation doesn't make sense. Without Paul's personal struggles in the faith, we miss texts about suffering for Christ's sake.

Perhaps now we hear with renewed hope, 'One doesn't live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' This is why Jesus said, "Let anyone with ears, listen!"

Martin Luther said of the Holy Bible, these words. "The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me... A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a cardinal without it." Quoted in "Martin Luther--The Early Years," Christian History, no. 34.

Which is why we at King of Glory so often pray, "Lord let our hearts be good soil...let us do your will and walk in your ways." Because as Christians, we see God's whole vision from the seeds to the dinner table!

"We acknowledge you, O God! You make the sun to rise, the rains to come and you are the sower of all blessings in our lives. You plant seeds, move rocks, make dead men rise and you, Lord, have a vision for your will on earth. We know you invite us, encourage us, wait for us to repent and turn to you! Over and over you stay your anger and in your loving mercy continue to scatter more seeds of grace than we can ever ask for or imagine being thrown our way. Make our hearts into your soil, God! Plow these our hearts, weed them, remove from them any impurities which might hinder your growth in our lives. Move us to open your Word and be fed by it and it alone. Water us with your grace and Holy Spirit that we might grow into the people you long for us to be. Fed by your Word, move us to love as you love, scattering seeds of grace everywhere we walk. Lord, let our hearts be good soil...your kingdom come...Lord let our hearts be good soil...your will be done...Lord let our hearts be good soil...on earth as it is in heaven."

Lord, let our hearts be good soil.
Amen.