

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ  
**Amen.**

Our sermon text today is written in Matt 13:1-23

Let us pray ...

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight; we pray through Your son, Jesus Christ.

### **He who has ears, let him hear**

Today in our gospel reading we heard Jesus' parable of the sower, in it we heard Jesus teaching a crowd about the Word of the kingdom. Although it is not brought out well in our English translations, the importance of His teaching is highlighted by the fact that Jesus begins and ends His parable with the call to pay attention to it.

Jesus begins His parable saying *BEHOLD!* Behold is a word we don't use much anymore: often we use words such as look or see, but they don't convey the same meaning. Behold is one of those words that says more than just look or see. It says STOP; stop what you are doing so that you can look and see what I am doing, listen and hear to what I am about to say. And then when He had finished His parable, He said *He who has ears, let him hear.*

But why is this parable so important?

The answer to this is the one that He Himself gives us - Jesus said to His disciples; *blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.* And He then says to them; *hear then the parable of the sower.*

Today's parable is all about the reception of the Word of God. In the parable Jesus uses the imagery of a sower, seed and the ground as an illustration for this message. The image we are given is one where someone is sowing seed in the field, and as they are doing so the seed that is being sown falls on four types of ground. Some falls on the path, some on the rocky ground and some amongst the thorns, and finally some falls on the good soil.

These four types of soil represent the people to whom the Word of God is preached. The first three scenarios that Jesus presents correspond with the unholy trinity that Luther often named: the devil, the world and the flesh.

The seed that falls on the hard ground of the path points to those people who go through the motions of hearing the Word of God but almost immediately let the devil take it away from them. The devil calls God a liar, and many believe this and end up rejecting the Word of God and head down the path of eternal destruction.

The rocky ground describes the person who gladly hears the Word of God and believes it. This person is very enthusiastic about being received into God's kingdom and into membership in a Christian congregation. They expect - because they are Christian - that their Christian faith will exempt them from the troubles that other people experience in this life. They look to success and prosperity, good health and uninterrupted happiness as signs of their Christian-ness.

Sadly, there are many false prophets who lure people into their churches by teaching them to rely on false hopes. But then when reality comes upon them, when the troubles that are an inescapable part of living as sinful people in a sinful world come into these people's lives. When they come face to face with persecution, or hardships because of their Christian faith, they are left unprepared and give it up without much of a struggle, because their roots in the faith are too shallow.

The thorns in the parable represent *the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful*. In other words, the seed sown among thorns grows for a while but is unable to thrive.

This kind of listener is still too concerned about material things and the problems of this life. These folks have great difficulty trusting God to provide for all their bodily needs. They imagine that if they can only accumulate enough money and all the good things that money can buy, then they will be perfectly happy.

The problem is when riches come their way they do not satisfy and these folks will still not be happy, and the only solution is to try and accumulate more wealth. Even though they get richer and richer there is still no satisfaction, and so the cycle goes on, and they never have enough.

In other words, it is their reliance on money and the things that it can buy that is their god, and they become slaves to this. Conversely if these folks fail to get rich, they may still pin their hopes on what money could have accomplish for them. As we know, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and those who have little of it may love money as much as those who appear to be rolling in it. All this wanting and striving after money and things of this world obscures the Word of God and therefore doesn't produce the fruits of faith that glorify God.

Having said all this, God wants to save them all and invites them into His kingdom, but in each of these cases, it is the hearer who has not heard the Word of God and declined His gracious invitation. They preferred to live their lives according to the ignorance and the evil lusts of the sinful flesh.

Interestingly, as I was reading during the week one author suggested, that this morning's parable might be better known as the parable of the four soils. But if we were to shift the focus of the parable, I think the point of the parable would be lost.

You see, if we were to shift the focus away from the sower and the seed, and bringing the focus of the parable on to the soil, we would be pointing to the difference within the nature of the people: that is, we would be suggesting that, on one hand, there are some hearers that are basically good - that these folks are fertile ground. Meanwhile, on the other hand, we have others who have harder hearts, rockier spirits, and these are the poorer soil.

This explanation is humanly appealing, especially to those who have heard and believed. With subtle pride these believers could thank God that they are not like others: that they have been less resistant and more hospitable recipients of His Word because of some inner quality that they possess.

But, if we were to go down the road of appeal to human difference we would become guilty of hypocrisy. We would be no better than the self-righteous Pharisee's of Jesus day. We would be like the Pharisee who stands up in the Temple and gives thanks to God that he is not a sinner like the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14).

Another possible avenue might be to point the blame for the differences squarely at God himself. Perhaps the quality of the seed varies, or God chooses to send or not send sufficient rain and sun on some. Ultimately as we travel down this path, it will lead us towards the erroneous doctrine that teaches that God predestines some people to damnation and hell, while others are predestined for salvation and eternal life; which is known as the doctrine of double predestination.

In reply to the doctrine of double predestination, our Lutheran forefathers taught; *many are called and few are chosen* (Matt. 20:16) does not mean that God does not want to save everyone. Instead, the reason for condemnation lies in their not hearing God's Word at all or arrogantly despising it, plugging their ears and their hearts, and thus blocking the Holy Spirit's ordinary path, so that he cannot carry out his work in them; or if they have given it a hearing, they cast it to the wind and pay no attention to it. [Therefore] the fault lies not with God and his election but with their own wickedness.

The wickedness that is talked about here is our sinful human nature that rages against the will of God. It is our disobedience that flies in the face of God's righteousness and it is the reason why we need a Saviour.

Therefore the importance of this parable can only be seen when we place the focus solely on the seed that is being sowed, and in our gospel reading this morning it was the seed that was doing the sowing, that is, the incarnate Word of God - Jesus Christ - was sowing the spoken Word in to the hearts of those who heard it. Remember the words that Jesus spoke to His disciples - *truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it ... hear then the parable of the sower.*

These men, Jesus disciples, were those men who had ears, to hear Him, they had eyes that saw what He did, because they believed in Him. They were the good soil, in which the seed would germinate and grow, bearing a good crop, that they would in turn sow, after the day of Pentecost.

All those who hear the Word of God, and believe in His promises and cling to them are the good soil. Not because they are good, but because they have received the Word of God. They have heard Jesus proclamation the good news of God, when He said, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel”* (Mk 1:14–15).

But this is not always easy, we are tempted continuously, to either reject the Word of God - or at the least those parts that we find offensive, or to take the glory road and look to success and prosperity, good health and so forth as signs of our Christian wellbeing, or when we are not careful to become swamped by *the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches* [that] *choke the Word*.

Thankfully we do not walk alone, when we hold fast to the Word of God in perseverance, when we cling to His promises, then He will hold on to us through the faith that He has given us through the seed of His Word. God sent His only Son to dwell amongst us, to bring and sow the living Word in our hearts and it was He who was sent to suffer and die on the cross *so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16).

Folks, you and I are the good soil when we put all our hope and trust in Jesus Christ, and not in the things of this world. When we believe that He is the Son of God who forgives us our sin because of His all atoning sacrifice on the cross. And that this is given to us freely through His Word and Sacraments. And what a wonderful gift it is; it is so wonderful, such good news that we should pass it on, freely to others just as the apostles did.

As you do so, remember the words of the prophet Isaiah says, *for as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it 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* (Isaiah 55:10–11).

Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

**Amen**