

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A

17th Sunday of Quarantine (After 1 Sunday Back)

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 55:10-13

Psalm 65:[1-8] 9-13

Romans 8:1-11

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

07/12/2020

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Paul,

<sup>1</sup>That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.  
<sup>2</sup>Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. <sup>3</sup>And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup>And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up.  
<sup>5</sup>Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away.  
<sup>7</sup>Other 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.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

## **Good Growth**

Good morning! Earlier this week we discussed how different an agrarian society is from our current context. Needless to say, I don't know anything about farming. But what I do know a little bit about is lawn care. And what I don't know, I make up for in enthusiasm. Now, I realize it's a little cliché for a middle aged male homeowner to like a nice lawn, but it's true. I think it's the Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, wanting to have everything nice and neat and symmetrical. By the time I moved out of my parents house I had the lawn looking fantastic. Unfortunately, when I moved into our current house, it was clear that the previous owners didn't have nearly the same dedication. The most obvious problem was the very large line of dirt where the waterline had been replaced. Over the past 3 1/2 years I've spent more time than I care to admit adding dirt to holes. I've also used a great deal of grass seed and fertilizer. But it seems that I'm like the sower, throwing seed amongst rocks, thorns, and everything in-between, trying to get the lawn to look a little nicer. I figure I'll get it looking nice right about the time we move, just in time for me to start all over again.

Get used to the language of planting and growing, because for the next several weeks we'll be dealing with parables around that theme. In

fact, in chapter 13 alone we find half of all the parables written in the Gospel of Matthew. Parables serve an important function in all of the Gospels. One commentator points out that *“The Greek word derives from a verb meaning ‘set side by side,’ that is, compare... Behind Matthew’s Greek, however, stand the Hebrew Scriptures, where the word mashal... was also used for enigmatic speech; it often designated a statement whose meaning was not immediately apparent... What follows is an allegory, which has to be explained to the audience.”* So we aren’t meant to get the point right away.

So what does the story mean? Well, one thing to remember is that none of the parables are perfect comparisons. In other parables Jesus even says “the Kingdom of Heaven is like...” It’s a nice reminder that when it comes to talking about God’s reign, our human words tend to miss the mark. But what is also clear is that Jesus isn’t talking about apocalyptic end-time harvest. This isn’t a story about how some will be saved and others won’t.

The story is best understood in two ways. It can be hard for us to separate the two because of the influence that the second half of the text can have over us. One writer points out that *“The original parable of Jesus focused on the surprisingly abundant harvest despite initial threats.”* And

that the second half of the text *“emphasized four kinds of soil, with the implicit... question ‘What kind of soil am I?’*

This outlook can be dangerous though. SO many Christians have read this text and nodded their heads thinking that THEY are the good soil, lamenting that those poor souls who were in the rocks and thorns just never saw the point. I think that there is a better third option, and fortunately, my man Douglas R.A. Hare agrees when he makes the following point:

*“Matthew’s perception of the contrast between those who receive and ‘understand’ the word and those who simply receive it... must be interpreted from the Old Testament background, where ‘understand’ implies acknowledgment of God’s sovereignty... Here, ‘understanding’ refers not to intellectual awareness but to a moral commitment involving one’s inmost self. Such an understanding is so far beyond intellectual competence that it is regarded as God’s gift. Accordingly, for Matthew the people who hear the word and understand it are those ‘to whom it has been given. By grace, not by human effort, are they able to incorporate the word into their very being.’*

So understanding the word of God that has been planted is about “a moral commitment involving one’s inmost self.” If you’re anything like me, that means sometimes we are able to make that commitment, and at other

times we're unable. Instead of looking at this text like we're all planted and harvested once, let us look at our WHOLE lives as a field where God continues to plant and work.

There have been times when God's word took hold and gave wondrous growth in my life. And yet, there have been times when I have been so distracted by the weeds and thorns that seeing what God wanted me to do was impossible. At other times I was like rocky soil, the word grew, but was unable to take deep root because I quickly turned my attention away. Sometimes I just didn't listen to what God wanted at all.

What's so critical for us to understand is that our lives with God are like the grass in my yard. There are always places that need tending. Something always needs help, and it's a task that needs commitment and dedication. When we become distracted weeds grow and things grow wild. Sin will always rear its ugly head, but God continues to give us the strength to look critically at our lives and find those places that need work, those places where growth can happen, where God changes the world, one part of our beings at a time. Amen.