

FBC Service Sunday April 23 2023 Luke 8: 1-15 The Sower, the Seed, and the Soil

Intro: The recent warm spell of warm sunny weather had quite a few of our area farmers itching to get into their fields. The long winter of fixing and repairing machinery was over, and I could see dust clouds as farmers began working up and planting their fields –hoping for an abundant harvest.

In our world success is often measured by numbers: how many bushels per acre, how many units were sold, how much money was made, how many people attended. This may be a way to measure success in the pursuits of the world **but it's not a measurement to be used in the spiritual realm.**

Attendance figures can be deceptive. Think about how many people would fill the sanctuary if we required so many weeks of attendance to be eligible for the drawing for a new car!

It would bring a sharp increase in weekly attendance but it would not tell us anything about a true response to the gospel.

The first thing we focus on is the sower. We know seed is expensive. You want to utilize every single little seed if you can.

So, we're surprised when we learn as the sower was throwing his seed, some of it landed on the hard path, some in shallow ground, and some in ground that would choke out the seed. It seems like quite a waste.

Simply put, it's the kind of farming the Israelites practiced in the ancient world. At that time and place, the land was not cleared of stones and plowed before the seed was planted. The common way of planting was to go out and scatter the seed, then plow.

In fact, the term plow has little relation to what we think of as plowing today. In ancient Israel, a plow was little more than a pointed stick with which one broke up the soil a little so that some seed would sink in."

It's in this context then, that Jesus tells this parable. He begins with the farmer who goes out to the field to sow the seed. In those days the farmers didn't have tractors to work the fields. All the planting and cultivating and harvesting was done by hand.

To sow the seed, to plant the seed, the farmer would have a bag of seed over one shoulder, and he would simply walk through his fields, and cast the seed this way and that by hand. As he sowed, the farmer showed no concern as to where the seed was cast or where it fell.

If this was truly about farming techniques, then a more frugal or careful farmer might argue that he should only sow his seed where that seed would have the best chance to take root. That he should only cast the seed on the soil that would be the most receptive to the seed.

But keep in mind, this may be a parable about farming, but it's a lesson on the kingdom of God and the way the Word of God is to go out, and how people respond who hear it.

The Gospel is to be sown generously, indiscriminately, everywhere and to all – without regard for

ethnicity or gender, or race or religion, or income, or occupation or even present spiritual state.

Even those who hated Jesus – and there were plenty of haters in the crowds who only came to listen to find fault, to find a reason to accuse Jesus. Even they received the sowing of the seed. It was sown wide and far, on all soils, **so all heard.**

The point that we should take from this is the importance of sowing seed widely. The seed in this context is the message of the Gospel. We know that not everyone is going to respond to the seed that was sown, but we want everyone to have the opportunity to respond.

We may miss some of the supernatural work of God if we only sow the seed of the gospel to the people who seem most likely to receive it. The best approach is to tell EVERYONE about Jesus. Some will welcome the message; some will turn away from it.

Our job is not to determine who is worthy to receive the message, our job is to *“go into all the world and preach the gospel.”*

In other words, we don't need to tell only church people about Jesus, or only people like us economically or racially. To do this is to fail in the command the Lord has given us.

We should tell the jocks as well as the castoffs, we should tell the wealthy as well as the poor, the healthy, and the addicted. **The message is for everyone.**

It's not our job to determine who **“the anyone”** should be. We're to scatter the seed widely and then watch for God to work expectantly.

In this stage in the ministry of Jesus He was drawing big crowds. As we compare the other gospel accounts we learn that the crowd was so large that Jesus needed to get into a boat so he could teach without the people crowding around Him.

Jesus knew that most of the people in the crowd were not there because they had responded to His message, but rather because they wanted to see miracles, and they hoped Jesus might be able to meet their material needs.

The parable before us is the most popular parable Jesus ever told. It reveals the different ways that people respond to the word of God and the consequences of their choices.

It's recorded in three of the gospels (also in Mark 4 and Matthew 13). Before Luke gets to the parable he gives us a little background about those who supported the work of Jesus.

The Twelve were with him, and also some women.

These women played a vital “behind the scenes” role in the ministry of Jesus. Clearly, the message of Christ was not anti-woman. He valued women just as He did men, and these few verses remind us that any successful ministry depends on both supporting it with their time and talents.

This much we can say about our Lord. People could understand what he was saying. His

parables are illustrations designed to make truth easier to grasp (much like illustrations in a sermon). So here he begins with the parable of the sower and four types of hearers.

His hearers would have had no problem understanding what he had to say as this is one of the easiest parables to understand because Jesus outlines the parable, and then told the disciples what it meant.

There are three main parts to the parable: the sower, the seed, and the soil.

The sower represents God, who generously sows His word in the world.

The seed represents the word of God, which has the power to produce fruit in those who receive it. The four types of soil represent the four types of hearts that people have:

Hard

Rocky

Thorny

And Good

Have you ever wondered why is it that some people hear the Gospel and it resonates in their lives, and to others it's completely irrelevant?

This parable explains why two people can be sitting in the same pew, hear the same message, and yet respond differently. **Jesus identified four different kinds of responses.**

The Unresponsive Heart. **The first person** has an unresponsive heart. The word of God does not penetrate their hearts and is quickly snatched away by the evil one. The seed falls on this ground but it cannot penetrate the soil. It lies on top of the soil until the birds come and eat the seed. These are the people who hear the Word of God and have no response to it at all.

They can sit through a time of teaching but they don't see any of it as relevant to their own soul. They may read their Bible once in a while but they are merely reading words; they're not listening for the voice of God. They're not interested.

The hard soil represents those who are resistant to the word of God. They don't understand it or accept it. They're like a path that's been trampled on by many feet and birds.

The Impulsive Heart. **The second kind of person** is the one who is like seed that has fallen on a shallow layer of soil on a bed of rocks. The seed may grow quickly but it cannot develop any root system. It will quickly die because it cannot find any moisture.

This rocky soil represents those who are superficial in their response to the word of God. At first they receive it with joy, but they have no root in themselves. The word of God does not take root in their hearts and is soon withered by trials and persecution.

These are the people who respond enthusiastically and emotionally to the gospel message. They may walk an aisle, say a prayer, make grand professions, get baptized and depart all excited. But it doesn't last.

They respond impulsively but never consider the true nature of the commitment called for by Christ (that of self-denial, sacrifice, obedience). They have no root. When the novelty wears off they drift away. Most of us have known such people over the years.

The Preoccupied Heart. The third group, the thorny soil represents are those who are preoccupied or distracted by the cares and pleasures of this world. They receive the word of God, but they also allow other things to grow in their hearts.

They are too distracted to follow Jesus.

Jesus said, *"The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature."* (v.14)

This seed falls into the soil and begins to grow but is overcome by weeds and thorns. It cannot get any sun or moisture so it eventually dies.

This is a picture of people who are so preoccupied with the things of this world that they just don't have any time to give attention to their spiritual life.

Many of these people had a vibrant testimony once. They may have stories about their past experiences of following Christ. **The problem is that their whole Christian experience is something past** – they are devoting their lives to something different now.

I believe these first three types of responses are not genuine believers. Two of the three look genuine initially but it's temporary. They are not real followers.

The Fourth Type Of Person Is The One With The Receptive Heart. These people are like good soil. The seed takes root and grows into a healthy and fruitful plant. These are people who hear the Word of God and they take it to heart.

They understand it and accept it. They are like a rich and fertile soil that produces a bountiful harvest. The word of God takes root in their hearts and bears fruit in their lives.

They put the message into practice and the Holy Spirit takes up residence in their life. These people, by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, keep going.

When they fall they get up. When they drift, they quickly return. They seek God's strength to serve Him faithfully.

These people let the Holy Spirit and the Word of God get inside of them. They are open to the correction and direction that God gives us. As a result, the Word of God becomes the centre of their life.

Their heart begins to change and the Word begins to bear fruit in the way that they live their lives. You can see the clear evidence of Christ in their lives.

In this parable, given the right circumstances, under the right growing conditions, the seed when planted in the right soil, will sprout and grow and bring forth an abundant harvest.

Another important detail about this seed is that though some of the seed falls on bad soil and does not produce any crop at all, **it is not the fault or the failing of the seed.**

Either the seed, convicts and opens the hearts and minds of the hearer so that they receive it and respond in faith and are saved, or it closes and hardens the heart of those who reject it and will not will not put their faith in Christ.

It's comforting to know that the results do not depend on us. I want all of us to hear that loudly and clearly today. The results do not depend upon us. Our calling is to simply be obedient to the task God has given to us. **We're called to sow the seed and trust God for the results.**

This is what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth when they were boasting and bragging about who was the superior preacher and who was converted under whose ministry. He wrote, *what, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul, only servants, through whom you came to believe.*

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

We merely sow the seed and it's God who grants the harvest.

All throughout his ministry Jesus had been sowing the seed generously and liberally.

He was sowing the seed to Jew and Gentile alike. To men and women alike. To religious zealots as well as to tax collectors, and prostitutes and sinners.

Everywhere he went, huge crowds gathered to hear what he had to say and to be healed of their sicknesses and diseases.

So already here we see that the ministry of Jesus was bearing fruit. The seed had been sown and it was already producing a wonderful harvest.

While it's pastors and missionaries who are called to this task by the church, pastors and missionaries and evangelists are not the only ones who sow the seed.

Every one of us here today, in some way, are farmers who sow the seed of the Gospel. It's especially true that parents sow the seed of life in the hearts and lives of their own children and grandchildren.

Husbands and wives sow the seed of God's Word in their marriages, as each spouse exercises spiritual influence on the other. Husbands and wives ought to learn from each other and grow in godliness together.

Beyond that, every one of us sows the seed of life each day we live in this world. We sow both by word

and deed. **Think of your field as your entire area of influence in your life.** It includes everyone you come into contact with every day.

I'm not saying we have to get in the face of everyone we meet. But it does mean that whenever and wherever possible, we ought to show the love of Christ to those in our sphere of influence.

Especially in those circumstances where God gives us the opportunity in relationships that we cultivate, that if the opportunity presents itself, we speak lovingly about the hope that we have in Christ.

Remembering as we sow, it's God who grants the harvest. Sow the seed faithfully and by faith leave the rest to God.

Jesus ends his parable with these words: *"Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."* This parable is not only about preaching the Word, but it's about how we listen and respond.

The wise man or woman is the one who hears the Word of God and does what it says.

As Jesus talks about the different kinds of soils, and the different spiritual conditions they represent, we recognize that we're all in this parable somewhere.

The parable of the sower and the seed challenges us to examine our own hearts, and ask ourselves: what kind of soil are we? How do we respond to the word of God?

The way we respond shows and reveals what's in our hearts; what kind of soil we are. **And it reminds us that good listening is just as important as good preaching.**

Let's strive to be good listeners, better listeners, and to analyze our own lives to see if what we're hearing on Sunday is bearing any fruit on Monday.

Let's pray that God would make us good soil, that we may hear His word, keep it and bear fruit for His glory.

Prayer: