

## 6th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 12, 2020

Text: Matthew 13:1-9 and 18-23

Theme: Good Soil

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

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod (where I served before coming to Redeemer) recently held a virtual meeting with their bishop. It was the day they were celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ordination of Women in the Lutheran Church. During their devotions the bishop asked those present to write down the names of all the women pastors who were a part of their faith journey. Because of time constraints he just wanted the names and not the reasons for choosing them. Once the names were compiled they entered into a time of prayer and listened as the names were read aloud.

Hold that thought for just a minute as we look at our gospel lesson. Each will inform the other.

In the gospel lesson we find Jesus sitting in a boat (on a lake) and whole crowds of people are standing on the beach ready to listen to his every word. It is a beautiful scene as Jesus starts to tell them a story about a sower whose seeds fell into various places on the ground. Some seeds fell on the path and were eaten by birds. Other seeds fell on rocky ground and died quickly because they did not have time to develop deep roots. Other seeds fell among the thorns and the thorns choked them. Finally some seeds fell on good soil and brought forth an abundance of grain (all in varying amounts). Jesus ended the story with these words – *The one having ears, let that one hear.*

Many of us are familiar with this parable and the interpretation that follows seems self-explanatory. A sower throws out a whole lot of seed and depending on where the seeds fall, they produce different amounts of grain. Good seed plus good soil results in a good harvest. As we strive to be that good soil Jesus tells us that we are to listen to the Word of God (the seed) and not let the evil one come and snatch it away from us.

Once we come into the joy of his presence we are to stick with his Word and give it time to take hold so that when suffering comes we can deal with the pain in a faithful way. And as for the thorns, they represent all those things that lure us away from our love of God and that tempt us to make other things more important than God.

The last sentence that I translated in the Greek (the one having ears, let that one hear) captures best one of the purposes of the parable. Jesus is telling us that just hearing the Word of God is not enough. The word *to hear* also means *to obey*. Jesus wants his followers to pay close attention to the Word of God not only to understand it but also to act on his teachings (that is the obedient part). And in other parables that have the same ending we learn that we also need to listen with compassion. When we open our ears then we also open our hearts.

So let me go back to the devotion that took place in Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod a couple of weeks ago. On that same day there were many postings on Facebook from people who wanted to not only name the women pastors who nurtured them but they went on to share how the seeds that were tossed in their direction landed on good soil. I was the recipient of some of those comments and in some cases I was surprised to see who wrote them. It reminded me that we may never know where or when the seeds of God will find receptive soil.

It was a wonderful exercise and affirming for those of us called to Word and Sacrament ministry. I know I continue to be mentored and nurtured by those who serve the Lord in this capacity – from both male and female pastors. I also know that my faith started to deepen much earlier than when I began to spend so much time with pastors.

It is my grandfather that I think of immediately. He was a gentle and kind man with a hearty laugh. When we visited my grandparents over a weekend we always went to church as a family. I would always sit next to my grandfather and he would guide me through the service. And when we came home after church I would watch him help my grandmother prepare dinner and do some of the other household chores. My grandmother suffered numerous strokes and had some physical limitations. He was always there to lend her a hand. I watched him and learned what it meant to care for others.

Both of my parents had a tremendous influence on my life of faith. We attended worship services every week. Every morning my mother read to me from the Bible until I was old enough to read it on my own. As an adult I would visit them over long weekends. We would follow the same routine that we did when visiting my grandparents. We would go to church and then come home. I would watch my dad help my mom prepare dinner and do some of the other household chores. My mother did not suffer from strokes, but she did not have the use of her legs. My dad was always there to lend her a hand. I watched them and learned what it meant to work as a team.

Bear with me as I lift up one more example so as not to restrict my list to pastors and members of my family. Her name was Katherine Hartman and was a member of First Lutheran Church in Pittsburgh, the church where my family were members. Katherine was from Romania and was raised during the Nazi occupation. She was the sole survivor of her Confirmation class and came to the United States soon after the war ended. By the time I met her she was already advanced in years. I knew she lived a simple life. She did so in order to give all that she had to the church. It was her financial stewardship that was the seed that she planted in me. I watched and learned what it meant to give without thought of return and to give generously because there would always be enough left over.

Good seed plus good soil results in a good harvest. Many of us know that even when good seeds are tossed out in abundance it does not always take root with our children or with other people who are in our presence on a regular basis. I think about that a lot. I often go back to a sermon I heard when in seminary. One of the professors preached on this text and he emphasized the fact that the sower tossed out as many seeds as possible and then kept going. He did not stay to tend to the seeds to make sure they took root and grew. He did not try to shoo the birds away or toss the rocks aside. He did not cut back the thorns so that the seeds would have a chance to grow. In the parable the sower kept on walking. The pastor was confident that God would send others to take care of those seeds.

It certainly gives us a sense of hope. We do our best each day to plant seeds of kindness and goodness in the lives of others praying that it will make a difference.

When my children were young I was a Sunday school teacher and I prayed before every class that the Word of God would take root in each child. When I go on mission trips with our young people I pray that our unique experiences would have a lasting effect on them. I pray a lot before I deliver a sermon.

In the *Parable of the Sower* we hear an invitation to thank those who planted seeds of faith in our hearts. We hear an invitation to thank God for sending us his Word and for his Spirit that continues to speak to us on those days when our hearts are hardened or stretched too thin or when other things take priority. Let the one with ears – let that one hear. Toss those seeds. Be generous with the Word of God. We just never know where or when the Word of God will take root and grow in abundance. Amen