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Sexagesima  
Luke 8:4-15  
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I am the king of making things more difficult than they need to be. Perhaps you can relate. Perhaps you know people like me. So much for simplicity – why do it the easy way when you can make it harder on yourself and add more stress to your life? Hardly a mantra to live by – but what we end up doing much of the time, nevertheless.

Sometimes we wonder why Jesus was making things “more difficult” by speaking in parables. We may think Jesus is using confusing language when we hear about these teaching moments illustrated by picture stories, but it’s really not true. I wouldn’t say every parable is really easy for us to understand. However, I think keeping in mind one “simple” truth when hearing Jesus teach in parables is really helpful. Here’s the truth: We must understand that the parables were teachings spoken by Jesus to be heard and not read. There is a difference.

Here’s the point, and I hope this is helpful for you as well: When Jesus speaks in parables, His intent was for us to take away the simplest meaning. How do we know? Well because Jesus explains the parable in the simplest way. He says, the seed is the Word. The hard ground is a hard heart that does not receive the seed (Word) and the devil comes and takes it away (like the birds take the seed). The seed on the rocky ground has a hard time with growing roots so the sprout easily gets scorched by the sun because good roots are needed for a healthy life. And the seed among thorns... well, that’s not hard either. Thorns crowd the good seed and it can’t grow because there is too much in its way – much like the cares for riches and pleasure may be more important than what the good seed – the Word – would produce.

That’s it. You take away what the parable means just by simply hearing the simplest parts. Jesus Himself didn’t pick apart each illustration and neither did the disciples... for example, “well the seed could mean this or the hard ground could also mean that... etc... No. Let us take these words as they are and not make them something that Jesus never intended. In other words, and, for the purposes of this morning’s sermon, we are not going to dwell on how the seed failed when it was planted. Rather, I would like to address the simple fact that when the seed – God’s Word – is sown in the hearts of mankind, most of the time it will not take root.

So, with that in mind, here it is in the simplest of terms. There were four different places that the sower scattered the seed. Three out of the four attempts were complete and utter failure. Only in one place did the seed do what the sower would hope it would do.

For the purpose of illustration, Jesus mentions that only 25% of the time will the seed do what we expect it to do – work, produce and be fruitful. That’s not the number for success. Remember, keep it simple. The point simply is this: when sowing the Word of God – sharing our faith – inviting our family and friends to church, in this world we live in, we will experience more failures than success. That’s what we can take away from what Jesus said.

But here is one other point for you and me – and it’s a point of encouragement. Keep on planting the Word. It will fall on hard hearts. It will fall on shallow hearts. It will get choked out by thorns and thistles. Success is never guaranteed. As a matter of fact, Jesus points out you will fail more than succeed. We plant and it’s up to the Holy Spirit to grow. We will sing that very sentiment as the closing hymn this morning. It’s unusual for us to have a closing hymn to the

Service here at Christ Lutheran. However, I couldn't resist. Meditate on those words of hymn 921 when we sing them a little later. We trust that the Lord will sprout and grow.

Trusting that the Lord will take care in the midst of our troubles is really all we can do – especially when we feel the most helpless. Whether we are talking about sharing our faith with our neighbor, or waiting on test results from the doctor – or, kids, from your teacher – sometimes we sit helpless just waiting to hear word. When you hear word, sometimes there is great success, but you understand that there are failures as well. Sometimes, many failures.

God never promises an easy way and He never promises success in all that we do. As a matter of fact, we can be confident, from a simple illustration like this parable, that most of the time, we will see failure – just like the farmer who planted the seed and it fell on ground where the seed didn't, couldn't take root.

Remember, it's simple. It's simple for us to find the hard ground or the thorny ground. It's so prevalent. And with our hearts that turn aside from what God would love to grow in us, we too contribute to higher percentage of bad ground. When excuses for other things take up residence in our own hearts, God's will for us gets pushed out. His desire is for you and me to continue to grow – but at times we think we have grown enough and now other things can make us stronger and better. To be the good ground each day in our Christian life does take effort – it does take energy. It's easy to have a hard heart ourselves. It's easy to be shallow like the rocky ground. It's easy to become clouded with so much in life that the Seed of the Word has no room to grow.

Remove the rocks and the thorns and thistles. Keep it simple. When the Lord plants the seed of faith through you to others, you know you will encounter such things as the parable describes more times than not. God says so. So, expect it. There is so much more against than there is for. That's the case with the lives of others and with our own lives at times. We can relate. The Word is persistent. The Word of God does its work – on us and through us. It's not rocket science or brain surgery, as people will say when something seems to be difficult. No, the Word, through the work of the Holy Spirit, grows the children of God in our Christian life and brings us the assurance of a blessed eternal life.

It's simple, Jesus loves you to death – His own death. It all came about in “less than simple” ways. An uprising during the Passover, a disciple who could be bought, a hostile takeover in a garden, a secret meeting of the Sanhedrin, a trial early in the morning before the Roman official named Pilate, beating Him, stripping Him, making Him walk the long way to Calvary. Not so simple of our Jesus. But all He had to do was one simple thing for you. Die.

And die He did. He did it for you. And now His death is at the forefront of our life. Our words are led by that death of Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit to hearts that are hard, rocky or way too crowded. But it still lives – for those we love and for you and me.

Here's the simplest truth from that parable in today's Gospel: The Word will be heard and have success. Not how we will it to happen – but as God's will shall be done. We plant and God spouts according to His will and His own way. It's simple – Jesus loves you and He died for you. Amen.

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