

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Sexagesima
Luke 8:4-15
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Have you ever noticed in the Gospels how Jesus, at times, doesn't seem all that bright? Think about it for a minute... He calls common fishermen to be His disciples and not men of influence who could really change the minds of the people. Then, if calling fisherman was not enough of a "bonehead" move, when He tells them to fish He tells them to fish in the deep – the place where no experienced fisherman would ever go to look for fish. Then, He called tax collectors and sinners to be by His side. Everyone knows you don't ask the most despised of society to be your friend by rubbing shoulders with crooks. And if that's not enough... He would dine with them and, thus, call upon Himself the wrath of those who thought they knew better. And what is more, He went into the region of the Samaritans and that of the Gentiles... preaching the good news to people who were thought to be so lost, no one could save them.

And then last week Jesus tells a story. And in all practical purposes the story doesn't even make sense. An owner of a vineyard would give the same wage to a worker who worked one hour in the vineyard as well as the worker that worked all day? Who does that? What kind of silly story are we hearing? And now, this parable in the Gospel appointed for today. A sower of seed goes out and spreads seed on the countryside and only 25% of the seed finds the good ground. All the other seed is eaten, scorched or trampled. Seriously, who has that kind of money... to buy enough seed to waste ¾ of it without even a chance that it will grow and produce? Not only is it what Jesus *does* that doesn't make sense, it's also what He *says* that doesn't make sense. Jesus doesn't seem too bright.

It's true, at first glance we might think this guy has no idea what He is doing. The same with His disciples, right? At times they seemed to have no idea... no clue what Jesus was doing and what He was saying. They questioned Him... a lot. They were confused by Him... a lot. But by the time Jesus' death and resurrection roll around... by the time He spent days with them after being risen from the grave... by the time Pentecost and church spread throughout all the world through the work of the Holy Spirit... things started to come together and make sense.

For anyone reading the Scriptures or hearing these stories for the first time, Jesus might seem to be not too bright. His stories didn't make much sense from a practical point of view... the company that He kept was not the kind of crew that a man claiming to be God would keep, and the advice that He gave and the actions that He took really did not show that He knew what He was doing.

Yet for us Christians today, we see the bigger picture. We understand that for Jesus to tell us about His unfathomable mercy, He had to tell a story about how His grace goes beyond understanding... giving the same gift out of mercy to all the workers of the vineyard no matter how long they worked. We understand that by His unfathomable mercy that He would keep company with those who seem to deserve it the least and carry forth the Gospel message of love and hope to those considered outside of God's promises.

And only when we look at what Jesus said through the lens of mercy do we understand how a sower would allow so much of his seed to be thrown all over the countryside while knowing all along that only a small part of that seed would produce what it was made to produce. The sower of the seed sows mercifully... every bit of ground gets seed. Not because it deserves the seed... Not because it has earned seed... but because of the sower's mercy. Sound familiar? Last week the owner of the vineyard was so merciful with his wages... this week the sower is merciful... abundant... with spreading God's love.

The great thing about this parable is that Jesus explains it. Maybe for this reason we don't have to spend too much time dissecting what each part means... Jesus does a good job with that on His own

and Christians, who understand that the Lord had every intent to attribute a heavenly meaning to these words, can understand quite well what Jesus meant.

However, I want you to hear again the part about the seed falling on the rocky ground and then listen to another illustration that gives us an even clearer picture of what it means to be a disciple: *“And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.”*

In another example we might think of a parade where there are soldiers marching and people watching. The well-tailored uniforms, the shining weapons, the glittering medals – all these are so impressive that suddenly those watching feel as great urge to get into the parade... to become one of the uniformed soldiers... so defined... so impressive. But actually to get into the army, to join the service as a full-time undertaking – that is something completely different

And so there are also folks who at one time or another, for one reason or another, are very much impressed by the idea of becoming a Christian. To such our Christ still says, “I have no comfortable place to lay My head in this world, for My way leads to Jerusalem and to the cross and to death and to the tomb. If this is the kind of Christ you want, then come follow me.”

All of a sudden being a Christian doesn't seem so attractive... when we are persecuted for it... when we are going to have to trudge through the hard times with Jesus... when the excitement of being a part of a group, or an organization wears off.

How will you act, or react, when being a Christian is “not so easy?” Sure, it's easy to be on the bandwagon when things are going well, but when life gets tough... are you still living as a Christian? Do you actively seek out the Lord, His wisdom and strength in midst of the toughest times or do you subscribe to the philosophy that says, “I'll devote more time to my Lord when things settle down in my life. I'll be a better Christian when I get things figured out... when my struggles lessen.” Does that sound backwards to you? It should because it is.

Don't fall away from the Christian life when things are the toughest. No, rather, dive into it all the more. God is our stay... our help, our strength in moments of despair. He is not the “go to” guy when days are easy and being a Christian for that day seems like a fun thing to do. Being a Christian is not a part time thing. It is what you are every day of your life... every moment. And when you are given the opportunity to be in the midst of His grace-filled means... by all means take advantage. When you have the opportunity to put your uniform on and be a Christian soldier... by all means, do that too. No rocky ground for you. Be the good soil... the soil in which the life of Christ, the church, grows and flourishes.

The Gospel of Jesus, by the work of His workers... by the germination of the Holy Spirit, penetrates sinful hearts and causes faith in believers. For us Christians, we never stop spreading seed, no matter what the ground may be. We spread it... the Holy Spirit causes it to do its work. And that is God's work in this. He is ultimately the sower of the seed. He gives growth and He knows what He is doing.

So, is Jesus, “not so bright” because He would sow seed in places that are too rocky, too shallow and too hard? No. He knows what He is doing. Don't mistake God's mercy and benevolence for a lack of understanding about being a good steward. God sows everywhere in the hopes of saving the lost. One last reminder that Jesus gives us in the Gospel... *“What man of you having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?”* See how God's mercy and love goes so far and deep for all His creation... yes, for you too. Amen.

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