

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23
Proper 10A + July 16, 2017
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
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The Sower Sows

The Word of the Lord from Matthew 13:3: "A sower went out to sow." This is the Word of the Lord.

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

Here's good news: the Sower sows, *and* He sows indiscriminately. He doesn't sow to get the most bang for His buck: that would mean that He'd save that precious seed only for fertile ground. But He doesn't. He throws it around so that some lands on hardened paths, some on rocky ground and some among the thorns. Seeds are landing everywhere. It's almost like the Sower could never run out of seeds, and He's looking for a harvest even in places where you wouldn't expect to find anything at all.

And so it is. The Sower is Christ, the seed is His Word, and the field is the world. Christ goes out into the field and He sends His Word everywhere. How? A few chapters earlier, in Matthew 9, Jesus said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Then He sent the disciples out to proclaim His Word, heal the sick and cast out evil spirits. He confined them to their fellow Jews for that mission trip; but He didn't say, "Proclaim My Word only to those who seem to have their lives in order." He didn't say, "Heal the sick who will then be able to take on leadership positions." He sent them out to spread His Word, to sow His grace to whomever they found. Later on in Matthew, He'll send His disciples into all the world, to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching.

As we rejoice in the Sower's generosity, we should take a look at the different plots of dirt in which He sows His Word, for it's in the field where we are to be found. It's by describing different sorts of dirt that the Savior speaks His Law to us. It's clear from Scripture that we can do nothing to save ourselves: *even the most weed-free, fertile field produces nothing unless seed is sown within it.* In this text, though, Jesus warns of temptations that would lead us quickly to reject the Word that He speaks to us.

Jesus says, "Some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them;" and He later explains, "When anyone hears the Word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path." How the devil wants to snatch away the Word that the Lord puts in your ears, and so he will whisper all sorts of excuses as to why you shouldn't listen. You'll be tempted to think that church attendance is all about earning points before the Lord – that it's enough that you're here, even if you don't pay attention and listen. You'll be tempted to daydream about all sorts of things within these four walls, because the devil would have you think about anything than the Lord's Law and Gospel for you. He'll persuade you that you need not listen to the sermon because you've heard it all before, or because you stayed up late last night and listening takes work, or because the pastor isn't as interesting as the one from the last church you were at, or because it's a tough text that takes some effort to think through, or because it's the weekend and you shouldn't have to work hard at anything on a Sunday morning.

And should you fall into any of these temptations on an ongoing basis, then the devil will get you thinking, "I don't get much out of going to church. I might as well stay home next week."

These are real temptations, all designed by the evil one so that you hear without listening, so that the readings and the sermon sound like Charlie Brown's teacher (Wah-WAH-wah-WAH-wah-WAH!). I've half-joked before, and will say it again: one of the great blessings for me of being a pastor is that I *have*

to listen to the sermon – and do so several times. I'm amazed how often come the temptations to do anything but hear and meditate upon the Word of God. Don't be deceived: anyone will tell you that actively listening to anything takes effort, but it's twice as difficult when the devil is at work to keep you from hearing. The less of God's Word you hear, the more of everything else fills your heart and mind. Everything else is far less holy, and nothing else but the Word of God produces fruit within you.

Jesus goes on, "Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had not depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away." He later explains, "As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the Word, immediately he falls away." Rocky ground can help seeds at first: the rocks catch and store heat so that the seeds sprout and grow quickly; but the plants don't make it to maturity because the rocks permit no root. With that, Jesus warns of another temptation, that of settling for a shallow faith and knowledge of the Word. If you are to have faith, the devil prefers that it be shallow. He'd prefer that you think of the Word of God as a handy book like a first-aid guide or a dictionary, something to pull off the shelf only it's *really* necessary. Such an attitude keeps your faith weak, because it's the Word that feeds and strengthens your faith. If you pay no attention to the Word until some trial comes along, it means that you have arranged for your faith to be at its weakest when you are most in need.

The devil tempts you to complacency of faith all the time, arguing that you've got enough to worry about, so put off the study of God's Word until another day. Do not listen to him, because some sort of trial or affliction or persecution is always on the way. The time to prepare for such trials is now, so that you might be ready when it comes. That's why weekly worship attendance is to be the rule, not the exception; this is for you and for your children. The same is true for daily personal Bible study, no matter your age. It's by His Word that the Lord feeds your faith: if you starve yourself in days of plenty, you will be terribly weak in days of trial. The threat is very real: at times, Christians who seemed so strong during the good times will fall away when trial pummels them; because despite appearances, they were not feeding their faith with God's Word on an ongoing basis.

There will be days when you are scorched. The best time to prepare for that is before it happens. This certainly applies to the strengthening of your faith by means of the Word of God.

Jesus continues, "Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them;" and He explains, "this is the one who hears the Word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word, and it proves unfruitful." This world comes with cares, and the devil fosters worry. You'll always have something to worry about, and every last one of those worries has the potential to become a god: not a helpful god, but a crummy sort of god that takes the place of trust in Christ as it fills your mind with the fear of the bad that might happen. But the cares of this world are not to become an idol that chokes your faith: they're there to preach the Law of your need for Christ, for His help and His grace. They're an opportunity for you to examine yourself and confess your weaknesses and lack of trust in God. A sleepless night of worry is an opportunity for prayer, not just anxious tossing and turning. And where it's those around you who are troubled, it's an opportunity to be God's hands and feet and take care of them.

The flip side of this part of the field is the deceitfulness of riches: this can be riches in the form of wealth or lifestyle or fulfillment or even experience. You and I remain blessed to be in a nation that really doesn't know what true poverty is, where there are always opportunities to do more fun things. In other words, the Lord has poured out great blessings of daily bread upon us. In response, the devil will pervert these things and use them against God. He'll use wealth to persuade you that you have no need for repentance. He'll make your dreams more important than the forgiveness of sins. He'll work to schedule the best experiences to conflict with hearing the Word of God. He'll distract you so that your faith is weak when trial comes, and your mind is full of the noise of the world that cannot save.

The world *is* full of noise, and we dare not forget the endless TV shows, videos, memes, forum threads, music groups and even those “old” things full of paper called “books”. None of these media are evil, and you’re free to make use of them – *as long as* they don’t do damage to your faith. But if you find that the music video, the romance novel, or reality show has got you contemplating sin more than Scripture, then you’re on the path to unfaithfulness.

Have a nice day: there’s hard soil and birds and thorns everywhere, looking to rob you of your faith and leave you condemned. Some of the temptations are obvious, some subtle. Some are frightening, some are fun.

All want to kill you.

But do you remember the good news of this text? The Sower keeps on sowing, and He keeps on sowing everywhere. He doesn’t say, “As soon as you use the roto-tiller of faith to break up the hard soil, then I’ll give you My Word.” He doesn’t say, “If you show that you can keep the birds at bay, then I’ll give you salvation;” and He doesn’t say, “Once you clear your field of every thorny temptation, then I’ll give you strength.” No, the Sower sows, and He keeps sowing.

This is important, because many preach the Gospel in a way that says you have to earn it, saying, “As soon as you plow up the field and get rid of the birds and the thorns, then Jesus will help you.” This is like saying, “As soon as you overcome temptation by yourself, then Jesus will give you the strength to overcome temptation;” or “As soon as you give yourself life, then Jesus will make you alive.” But you can’t make yourself faithful without the Word, because it’s the Word that gives and strengthens faith. That’s why, as a Christian, you don’t say, “I’ve got to show Jesus that I deserve His grace by getting rid of these sins on my own.” You say the truth: “Left to myself, I’m a field of hard, rocky dirt that’s full of birds and thorns.” In fact, you confess it: you acknowledge Jesus’ words about the many temptations you face, and you acknowledge how once again you’ve failed to listen to His Word in favor of cares and pleasures instead. And you acknowledge the wonderful news that Christ forgives you. And, forgiving you, He grants you His Holy Spirit, freedom from sin and strength to resist temptation.

See, plants can’t get rid of rocks and birds and thorns. That’s the task of the One who sows: it’s Christ who protects you and produces fruit in you. Beware of those temptations and cares that would be your master: confess them and rejoice that Christ comes. He sows His Word into your ears and says, “You are Mine; and I forgive you for all of your sins.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen