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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
July 30, 2017  
8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 55:10-11, Romans 8:18-25

Hymns: 1; 446; 49; 52

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea.

<sup>2</sup>And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

<sup>3</sup>Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold,

a sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup>And as he sowed, some *seed* fell by the

wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. <sup>5</sup>Some fell on

stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they

immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. <sup>6</sup>But

when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no

root they withered away. <sup>7</sup>And some fell among thorns, and the

thorns sprang up and choked them. <sup>8</sup>But others fell on good ground

and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

<sup>9</sup>He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" ... <sup>18</sup>"Therefore hear the

parable of the sower: <sup>19</sup>When anyone hears the word of the

kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes

and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who

received seed by the wayside. <sup>20</sup>But he who received the seed on

stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately

receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup>yet he has no root in himself, but endures

only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because

of the word, immediately he stumbles. <sup>22</sup>Now he who received

seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of

this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he

becomes unfruitful. <sup>23</sup>But he who received seed on the good

ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

**INTRO:** What a disaster!

When people make that kind of judgment concerning the plants they are trying to grow it may be time to consult an expert. On seed commercials or herbicide advertising it appears that the expert the farmers turn to is called an agronomist. It sounds like every farmer has one with whom he must consult, whose counsel and advice he must follow or there may be that ultimate judgment, “What a disaster!”

Those of us that are simply small time gardeners will consult with someone at the local nursery, hoping to find some knowledge that will give us a hint about what we should or should not plant in our part of the country, or what we might do to resolve the problem we are having.

Sometimes Jesus spoke in parables so that those who were spiritually deaf, those who spurned the gospel, actually wouldn't understand that Jesus was teaching lessons concerning the gospel and the kingdom of heaven. In the parable before us today Jesus taught a lesson concerning the kingdom using the farmer's job of planting, and so Jesus is the expert whose authority is beyond question, and we are brought some fundamental --

**THEME: Lessons in Spiritual Gardening.**

It all has to start with

**I. Planting the Seed: The Seed is the Word of God.**

It is easy for most anyone to look at my garden out in back on the other side of the parking lot, and make the judgment “that's not

much of a garden.” One might come to that conclusion for a variety of reasons. One might look and conclude: “Pastor didn’t even plant anything!” One might look out there and say, “All I see is weeds and bug ravaged plants! What a disaster of a garden.”

I might attempt to defend myself and say, “We have made earnest attempts to keep the weeds down. I have spent a lot on fighting those nasty bugs as well.” We did get some produce, but if you don’t plant you’re not going to harvest, and I didn’t plant. Again this year we let the ground go fallow.

Jesus begins this parable about the kingdom of God with the assumption that the farmer went out and planted, and that he did it with the broadcast method of seeding. That was an efficient way of getting the seed out there. When we apply that little statement to the underlying lesson about the kingdom of God we need to appreciate the obvious. The seed has got to be spread and planted or nothing is going to happen. In this case the seed is the Word of God, specifically the gospel of God’s love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus. The Lord entrusted us with the job of spreading the seed. He commanded us, “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*”<sup>16</sup> *He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*” (Mark 16:15-16)

We have the farmer’s job, and we can’t expect anything more to happen than what’s happening in my garden if we neglect this wondrous, gracious purpose for living. Yes, we have church services, and the pastor makes some calls, but this divine mission has been given to all of us. We need to spread the seed of the gospel, to spread it widely, broadcasting the news of God’s love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus, and then watch for the results. We hope and pray for the Lord’s blessing knowing that faith comes by hearing the message of the gospel, as Paul taught in Romans 10: “*faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.*” (Romans 10:17) But Paul also declared in the verse previous to that one, “*But they have not all obeyed the gospel.*” (Romans 10:16)

It is troubling that there are mixed results, however the farmer doesn’t stop planting seed simply because not every seed germinates and grows into a strong and productive plant. So we

also must continue to sow the seed of God's Word with the understanding that there are challenges that come with the planting of the Word of God;

## **II. Challenges to Good Production.**

Jesus teaches us that lesson in the parable so that we will not have unrealistic, idealistic expectations that would lead us to quit planting when we don't see what we consider the proper response to the gospel. Remember our Old Testament lesson this morning and the assurance that the Lord gave us through Isaiah. ***"So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."*** (Isaiah 55:11) So we know that God knows exactly what shall be accomplished with the sowing of His Word, and what will be accomplished will be what He wills. We plant the seed of the gospel, and we shall observe a variety of results, many of which we may find discouraging. These same results will serve as a warning to us to nurture and protect our own faith from the challenges our faith faces every day.

Yes, some of the seed seemingly didn't have a chance. Some people will dismiss the gospel out of hand as something they don't need. It may be that they are like the Pharisees who saw that their works of righteousness were sufficient for their own salvation. Others simply see the gospel as all this religious mumbo jumbo, the foolishness of the ignorant and superstitious. Either way it is the devil who is snatching away the Word before it has any opportunity to germinate into faith. This is especially discouraging when the recipient of our testimony is someone we care about dearly, and they dismiss what we have to say as unimportant.

Others hear the Word and receive it with joy. It is so exciting to see that joy in someone else when one has testified to the truth. And when it goes on for a while it is even more exciting, to continue to share the joy we have in Christ as our Lord and Savior. They come to church, they participate eagerly in classes, and then it happens, they just disappear. So it is that some will abandon the faith as soon as trouble comes in life. They had no deep roots of faith. They may think, "Jesus should have delivered me from trouble," or

someone will mock or tease even a little, and they will leave their faith behind rather than be embarrassed by a friend.

What a letdown! The devil wins again! Don't think, "Why should I try, it doesn't seem to make a difference?" God promises otherwise. The Lord would also have us look out for our own faith, that we do not let persecution or tribulation dissuade us from believing.

That's not the end of the challenges to the Word as we sow the seed of the gospel. Jesus mentioned thorns that choke out the faith of some. Those thorns and thistles are the weeds of this world's cares and pleasures, and the deceitfulness of riches. This is a real danger. Covetousness and worry seem like opposites, but they run hand in hand in the mind of man. So often we are tempted to think that we wouldn't have the troubles that assault us and give us sleepless nights if only we had a little more money. And then a little more, and a little more after that and all our troubles will be gone, and we will finally be happy.

That is the deceitfulness of riches. What is the price of one's soul? Judas sold his for thirty pieces of silver, but then it brought him despair and eternal death. Many, so very many neglect their faith in the pursuit of fun and recreation, and money, in the end they lose the "*pearl of great price*," the real and lasting treasure of the gospel. (Matthew 13:46-47)

Again it is a crushing disappointment to observe this in another person whose faith is slipping because of absorption of one's time and effort in the things of this world. But take heed to yourself and your faith, for it is very easy for anyone to slip into this patch of weeds that just grows up around our faith and makes it spindly and weak and totally unproductive. The weeds are there in that job schedule that doesn't allow time for church, or in the fun and socializing that is a part of everyone's "good" weekend. The weeds come in so many forms that it's hard to identify them all as weeds that are a threat to our faith's health and well-being.

However, we still have the Lord's promise of --

### **III. The Blessing of a Fruitful Harvest.**

When it comes down to the moral of the parable, it is all about becoming productive plants, about bearing fruit. Jesus emphasizes in the parable that this is not a constant. Some will bear more fruit than others, but it is the goal that the seed grows into a strong and healthy plant that is productive, that bears fruit for the Lord.

This is essential for the child of God. This is to be a concern for each and every one of us, beginning with our own faith. We need to realize that our faith needs attention. What happens to the garden that is neglected? It turns into that weed patch that bears little or no fruit. The fruit that is produced is of poor quality. Sometimes of such poor quality that it isn't salvageable.

A strong faith needs cultivation which the Lord Himself provides with the trials of this life. It also needs fortification. We all need to have our faith strengthened with the working of the Holy Spirit by the Word of God.

It is God's good and gracious will for you that you are included in that good ground which bears much fruit. How can I know that? Because the Holy Spirit has worked faith in your hearts. The Holy Spirit came to you in His grace. He came when you were dead in trespasses and sins, and He made you alive. God the Holy Spirit worked faith in your hearts, "*It is by grace that you have been saved.*" (Ephesians 2:1, 8-9.) The Spirit leads us in our praises, for it is the Spirit that made these praises of the Lord possible for "*No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.*" (1 Corinthians 12:3)

So it is that this abundant fruit begins right here as we gather in worship; that is a fruit of faith, even as our faith is nurtured here by the Word of God. So we leave here and we strive to serve our neighbor in love, and be a blessing to those around us. We live the love of Christ, and that is fruit, and others take note of our faith in action, and they ask for the reason of our hope, and we tell them simply that Jesus in the greatness of His love for us offered Himself for us as an offering and sacrifice to God. Jesus takes our sins away. That testimony is fruit. It is the seed of the gospel being planted in yet another heart. The Spirit promises that His Word will not return empty but will bear fruit.

And there we have the lesson in spiritual gardening. The seed is sown, and by God's grace when it was planted in your heart and mine, it was worked by the Spirit to be good ground, and we shall bear fruit to the glory of Jesus' name and for the spiritual blessings of those in this world. So let us strive to learn this lesson from the Master Gardener and incorporate it into our lives that we might bear fruit for Him.

**Matthew 13:9** "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

**AMEN.**

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen. (Romans 15:13)