**Sermon Matthew 13: 1- 23, 19 July 2023 Pentecost 7A**

**Videolink:** [**https://youtu.be/F7VYriDfLy4**](https://youtu.be/F7VYriDfLy4)

I don’t know much about farming, but surely most farmers are careful with how they use their seed a sowing time. You want to make sure you get a good return for your effort at harvest which means only sowing in soil that is likely to produce a good crop. This is not the case with the farmer in Jesus’ parable. This farmer appears to be very wasteful when sowing seeds. This farmer casts seeds indiscriminately on paths, rocky soil, shallow soil, thorn-infested ground and thankfully some good soil as well. The result is birds eating seeds off the paths, seedlings drying out and dying in the shallow soil, and wheat being choked by the thorns. What a waste of good seed.

Of course, this is a parable, and the seed isn’t really seed at all but a message. A very specific message. The message of the good news of the kingdom of God and the coming of the King Jesus Christ. It is the message Jesus wants us to bring to all nations and all peoples.

The parable is telling us that, unlike seeds which are finite and should be used carefully, we are not to hold back with this message. Instead, we are to spread the message generously even in places and to people who think would never listen to it, understand it, or believe it. We are to generously put the message out there accepting that there will be many who reject it but there will also be those who hear it and understand it. For those people, it will be life-changing, and they will produce abundant good fruit in their lives.

Another important message in this parable is that we will never know in advance in whom the message of the Good News of Jesus Christ will grow and produce fruit. Why? The soil in this parable is the human heart and only God can see what is inside a person’s heart. Our job is to plant the seed and if the opportunity presents to water it, but it is God through the Spirit who gives the growth (see, 1 Cor. 3:6-7). Our job is not to decide whose heart is hard like the path, or rocky or shallow or full of thorns, because quite frankly we don’t know.

It can be quite frustrating not knowing who will come to faith and who won’t. Most of us know of people whom we have prayed for many years, spoken to about our faith and the reason for our hope and yet have not come to hear, understand, and believe. We also know of people who have had faith in Christ but have fallen away. We often love these people dearly, like our own children, grandchildren, siblings, and friends. Not only is it frustrating but it can fill you with pain and sadness, and maybe even fear for their future.

The parable does though give us some insight into why the message of the gospel may not grow and produce faith and its fruits in people’s lives. A key insight is that some people simply do not understand the message. Knowing this reminds us that when we tell people about the Gospel of Jesus Christ we should attempt to be as clear as possible. This of course means we ourselves need to listen to and seek to understand the good news. The good news is very simple and yet many people even after going to church for decades still don’t understand it.

Here is where I need to make a confession. I first began to understand the good news six months after I began attending church in my mid-twenties. It was then that I discovered that through Jesus, God forgave all my sins. I began to understand the good news then and I learned more several years later when I attended Luther Seminary. When I was ordained, I thought I had a good understanding of the good news, but when I look back deep down I still thought I had to be good enough to measure up to God.

I think there are many Christians who live their life like that. We struggle to understand and believe that we are saved by grace, through faith without one single good work. The result is that we either become self-righteous looking around and judging people who are worse than us to prove to ourselves how good we are, or we are filled with guilt and dread because we know we can never measure up to the standards we think we have to maintain to be acceptable to God. These days, many people end up falling away from the faith because they have not fully understood and believed in God’s grace and think being a Christian is all about keeping rules and let’s be honest, keeping rules is hard work.

Eventually, over time the gospel became clearer to me as I meditated on the gift of baptism available even to babies who literally cannot do a thing to save themselves. As I read and reread the parable of the prodigal son, which may be better described as the “Parable of the Waiting Father”, I began to understand the depth of God’s love and the power of his embrace. More recently the gospel has become clearer as I have from personal experience glimpsed a measure of the depth of the waiting father’s love.

I am a work in progress, you are a work in progress, all of us who are in Christ are a work in progress and we need to listen intently to the good news, to hear it often, to experience it as we receive forgiveness in holy absolution and strength in the body and blood of Christ. As the good news becomes clearer to us, we can live it, bear its fruit in our lives, and explain it more clearly to those who do not yet believe.

As God works on us through word and sacrament we can support and encourage each other, be on the lookout for and be aware of those who are struggling in their faith. As our knowledge and understanding of the depth, breadth, height, and length of the gospel grows we can be on the lookout for opportunities to water the faith of those who are struggling, to teach them what we have learned and share our own experience of Christ’s love in our life.

In the meantime, we can look for opportunities to give the reason for our hope, and to show the love of Christ through our words and actions. We can remember that Isaiah tells us that the word of God will achieve the purpose for which God sends it. Knowing this we can continually pray with confidence to God, asking that the seed planted in unbelieving hearts will be germinated by the Holy Spirit and grow and produce fruit even in the hardest heart.

**Amen.**

Pastor Rolf Lungwitz