

Written Copy: Matthew 13:19-23-Extravagant Gospel Spreading

Proper 10-6th Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday, July 12th, 2020

Text: Matthew 13:19-23

¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ 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. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, 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. ²³ As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Exegetical Statement

Jesus in explaining how it is that His kingdom message is received by some but ignored and disbelieved by many tells the Parable of the Sower. The seed is the kingdom message that the reign of God had come in His appearance. The sower are all those called to give witness to Jesus and the Messiah-the long-ago proclaimed Savior of the world. This message is to be scattered liberally by His disciple seed spreaders without regard for who they might deem worthy or unworthy to hear it. Even so the majority of their efforts, for one reason or another won't produce the fruit of faith in the life of those they share the message with. Some will totally disregard the message because of Satan's activity in and around them that effectively cancels out their understanding the message. In other cases there will be an initial response to the message, but faith doesn't take deep root so that the troubles and temptations that are bound to come from their own hearts and the world turn them away from their Savior and back to themselves or whatever they were trusting in before faith came. For some it will be the temptations of the world or the love of riches that will choke the growth of faith and call to live apart from the world that will choke the work of faith. But for those whose hearts have been properly softened and worked up the Gospel will cause faith to take root deep in their life. And the Spirit will use the problems without and within to draw the believer close and keep them close

Focus Statement:

While we scatter the seed of the Gospel it is the work of the Spirit to prepare hearts by breaking the hardness of unbelief and planting the seed of the Gospel deep where it takes permanent root. The Lord promises that just as the rain and snow He sends always accomplish the growth He intends so does the seed of the Gospel.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Individually we can become disillusioned that our efforts to share the Gospel in many cases do not seem to produce the fruit of faith. As a Church we can become disillusioned that our Gospel outreach seems to be a waste of resources since there is no visible return.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Avoid judging our own personal outreach efforts or those of the Church by the number of positive responses but be extravagant sowers if the Gospel Message and leave the effectiveness of that seed in the hands of the Holy Spirit.

Subject Sentence: Extravagantly Spread the Gospel for the Spirit works it

Introduction: Ineffectiveness sharing the Gospel Now and Then

We all have them in our life. Loved ones, family members, friends, who we just can't seem to bring around to see things the way we do. Sometimes when we try to talk with them, they get terribly upset and walk away. More often we might find them politely listening, smiling, nodding agreeably, but walking away basically unchanged in their take on life. Now, I'm not talking about sharing political opinions. I'm talking about sharing our faith.

Who are the people in your life that you have tried to give Christian witness to, but it always seems to fail? Those whom you invite to join you in coming to Church, in participating in Bible Study, to come to a Church related function, and they always have an excuse, something else to do. Basically, they are not interested. And because of their reaction you begin to wonder if it has to do with you. Is there something that you should be doing and are not? Or is there something you are doing that you should not?

Perhaps you've wondered about the effectiveness of our mission work here at Lamb of God. You see people coming here for the blood drives, coming for VBS, coming for Trunk or Treat, but not coming to join us in worship. Maybe you look at the time, talents, and treasures we dedicate to Franklin Mission, and wonder if our Christian witness does any good. Maybe you have considered the decline in recent years in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, and the Churches and schools that have closed in our area, as well as the overall decline of the Church in this country. And you wonder if maybe it's time for a drastic change in how we worship and do ministry. Jesus disciples would understand. Perhaps they had wondered the same thing a time or two.

Jesus has been doing some amazing things up to this point in His ministry. He has healed every single sick person that has come to Him. He has cast out demons in all who he encounters. He teaches that love for God and compassion for others is more important than the rigid keeping of the law by the Pharisees that ignores the obedience of the heart. And in His ministry, He proves that no one is unworthy of His kingdom. He teaches with a power and authority unlike any that has come before. He is doing and saying things with the power and authority that could only come from God. And after all, this is the Son of God in the flesh doing ministry among men. Certainly, this is the formula for success; except it's not.

While many are following Him, the Pharisees, and experts in the Law, those who should've recognized Him to be the long-awaited Messiah, have declared Him to be an imposter. They declare that He does His work not through the power of God but instead by the power of the devil. And therefore, they are already plotting to destroy Him. And what about the people, the crowds who flock to Him to hear Him preach and to seek healing from Him? While they rejoice in His miracles, they too will soon find reasons to oppose Him when He doesn't fit their job description of the Messiah to come. Many follow but are not really invested in being His disciples. They are not ready to take up their cross and follow Him.

They are not prepared to leave behind their life in the world for Him. They are with Him as long as the times are good, and the miracles keep coming. We the Church can relate to this attitude of gratitude with a healthy dose of indifference.

Jesus teaching about Outreach in Parable of the Sower

Jesus tells the Parable of the Sower to address what seems to be a lack of effectiveness in His ministry and the work of the Kingdom message: The Gospel. In His Parable of the Sower, the seed that is being sown is the Word of the Kingdom, the Words of Scripture: both law and gospel. The sower is each and every person who has been called to scatter the seed of God's Word, both then and now. We are called to do this as individuals and as the Church reaching out to those around us. Notice how Jesus gives four different scenarios, three of which result in what the world and sometimes we ourselves would call failure. He wants us the Church to understand that the perceived effectiveness of the Gospel or lack thereof is not a problem with our scattering, but rests in the heart of mankind.

So, in His parable Jesus presents four different scenarios of sharing the Kingdom message, sharing God's Word-both Law and Gospel. And what stands out is the extravagant spreading of this precious seed. Now any farmer could tell us that you only sow seed in the earth that has been tilled and worked up. To sow seed on a hardened path, or in soil that has no depth, or among thorny bushes doesn't make sense, and is a waste of precious seed. But things are different when the seed you are spreading is God's Word. It is not our place to determine who is worthy of reception and who is not. Our job is to share God's Word with those whom He brings into our life. The sower is casting the seed about without regard to the kind of soil he is casting the seed upon. So, should we be extravagant spreaders of God's Word. It is for all men. It is not our place to judge who is worthy and who is not.

In Matthew 13:19, we see that in the lives of those with whom we share God's word there will be opposition. There is opposition from the devil who works in the lives of many to divert their attention, their ability to hear, and to take to heart the wisdom and truth of God's Word. Instead they have the wool pulled over their eyes by Satan and his worldly message that there are any number of ways to heaven. And that God is accepting of all lifestyles so that He would never reject a good person.

In Matthew 13:2-21 We see those who react positively to God's Word and faith is created. But that reaction is only temporary. When the problems of the world cause distress within, and the persecution of the unbelieving world strikes, they are not prepared to stand against it. They turn back to the world and to whatever they were trusting in before faith came.

Matthew 13:22 describes those who also have a positive response to the work of God's Word in their life. But even though faith is created the person is not made perfect. We are to be a work in progress. That means much of the baggage they had before faith came is still with them. The call of life in the world and the temptation to follow along are still there. It can be extremely hard to turn and begin walking against the flow of society and the values it sees as all important. And one of the biggest stumbling blocks for us as Americans is the temptation of worldly possessions and wealth. The Gospel calls the believer to have no other god above Christ. And in the battle for the heart love for worldly possessions often wins out, whether one has a lot of wealth or just desires to accumulate more of it. Jesus warns we can't worship Him and wealth at the same time. And sometimes wealth wins out. And it is much easier to live in agreement with the world's values than to stand against it. Especially in this age that demands political correctness and denounces beliefs that differ from the cultural norm.

But in Matthew 13:23 we see those in whom the Word of God brings forth fruit despite all the struggles and temptations of the heart and the world. The Gospel seed takes root and the faith that grows. And we can see it flourishing in the words and actions of those who have come to faith. Their lives reflect a miraculous change in their love for Christ and for others. These just don't happen as often as we might like. So, the question is why is there success only occasionally but not more often?

Real Power of Gospel Fruitfulness

Well the difference is not in the one who sows the seed, who spreads the Gospel. It is the same sower who met a lack of result in the three other cases. It's not in the seed, for it is the same message of Law and Gospel. The difference can only be found in the soil of the person in question, in the heart of the believer, and in how the Holy Spirit is able to work in the hearts and minds of those we share this message with. He works in different ways in different people.

The Holy Spirit uses the Law to break up the hard soil that is the hearts of those hardened by unbelief. Those who are trusting in themselves or have entrusted their future to some other name, concept, ideal, or god. Only the Holy Spirit can break through this unbelief. He works to soften hearts through times of loss, struggle, or pain making them see life is too difficult, too painful, and too scary to handle on their own. He shows them that whatever they are trusting in cannot handle their job loss, divorce, addiction, cancer, or death of a loved one. This is not something anyone can choose to do on their own. It's not something you or I can perform in another's heart through argument or persuasion. Only the Holy Spirit can accomplish this miraculous work.

And when the heart has been broken, when the soil of their life has been properly worked up, the Spirit applies the soothing salve of the Gospel. The Spirit Himself plants the seed of the Gospel that we had the privilege of sharing. He proves to them that Jesus is bigger than

any problems that might come their way. His love is stronger and higher than any other love in this world. Jesus must call them to Himself and grant them that most precious gift they could ever receive, the gift of faith.

Just as He once called you and called me. It's the same gift you once received that turned you from you sin to trust in Christ alone. The gift that is renewed in your life whenever you hear the Gospel message. He grants the power to hold fast to Jesus' unending mercy and forgiveness. Forgiveness that keeps being poured into your life despite all the ways you may have turned away in disobedience. Jesus is always there calling you back to Him, calling you to repent, and in doing so making you hold fast to His gift of never-ending love. Even when that disobedience is our refusal to be the spreaders of His Gospel message to the one's He brings us in contact with. He still loves us and forgives us. He still calls us His precious child and beloved member of His Church family. Forgiven and restored He renews our call to be the sowers of His Gospel Message to the world around us.

Be Extravagant Spreaders of the Gospel Seed

So, what can we, the Church and individual members of it take away from Jesus' parable? First of all, the effectiveness of God's word upon the heart of man is in the hands of the Holy Spirit alone. It is He who uses the law to break hardened hearts and it is He who plants the Gospel deep enough for it to take lasting root. Once someone comes to faith we can and should be tools in this process called discipling, but the work is that of the Holy Spirit alone.

Second, we should be aware that not every witnessing opportunity will bring forth fruit. In Jesus parable the majority of the Gospel seed sown doesn't result in lasting faith. This is not the fault of you, the Gospel spreader. It's not the fault of the seed that is God's Word. It's not the fault of the Holy Spirit. The fault lies totally with the heart of the person in question. And the reason many are able to turn away or give up faith is not explained by God in His Word. We are left to hold by faith God's Word and promise that He Himself desires that all be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

Thirdly we are not called to be the judge of soil or hearts before casting God's Word. We do know that the Law must break hearts before the Gospel can heal them. But we can never be 100% sure when a person has become sufficiently broken. Whether they are crying out in pain of searching for answers beyond them we can and should share the answer we have in Jesus Christ. Leave it up to the Spirit to accomplish that which is beyond us.

Fourthly we should not judge the effectiveness of our own witness or of our Churches Outreach efforts by the standard the world uses to judge success. Each soul is important to our Savior. He leaves the 99 behind to search for the one (Matthew 18:10-14). And if our efforts do not even serve to call the one, we take heart in God's promise from **Isaiah 55:11** **"so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."** We are called to deliver His Word. We should leave it up to the LORD that it produces what He sent it to do and not judge whether it has or has not ourselves.

Lastly, when the miracle of faith occurs in the life of another, we should rejoice greatly with them. For truly we have witnessed and were a part of one of the greatest miracles. We have witnessed God reach into the life of another and change the eternal outcome. We have been blessed to be a part of another being saved by grace through faith and given the gift of eternal life. We are to stand by them and help them in their growth of faith and knowledge of Jesus

Conclusion

The Lord has charged us to share His Word, to be spreaders of the seed that is the message of faith in Christ and our desperate need for His grace. It is not within our power to work the change in the heart of any man from unbelief to belief. This can only be done by the Holy Spirit. We are simply called to faithfully and winsomely share the very message that once changed your heart and mine. And we patiently wait for God to do the miraculous work that only He can do. Let Christ worry about the amount of fruit being produced. We are called to be the Church that witnesses to Him and let Him grow the Church. Amen.