

## Seed Sown

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

Hymn: "Your Kingdom, O God, Is My Glorious Treasure" (*LSB* 654)

"A sower went out to sow." That's how the first of Jesus' parables begins.

Apparently, Jesus liked parables. A third of all His recorded teachings were parables. We generally like them, too. They're very memorable. But I wonder if the people who first heard Jesus' parables liked them as much as we do. Did they even know what he was talking about? It's not as if Jesus told the people. In most cases, in fact, when he's telling a parable it's not clear he's actually telling a parable. We get the answer key often times, but they didn't. So, I wonder if they even understood. There was no "Now, kids, I'm going to tell you an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."

In Matthew 13, it's more like this. Jesus is sitting by the beach, perhaps hoping for some alone time and this crowd comes out and ruins it. So, he goes out on a boat, maybe so they could hear him better, and He says, "So this sower goes out to sow and throws the seed here and there." Then there's the stuff about the four soils and maybe afterwards He goes back to His piña colada and finally gets a nap in there on the boat.

So put yourself there. What do you think he's talking about? I know we get the answer key later, but most of the people in Matthew 13 didn't and *none* of them did at the start. So, what's it about? Maybe somebody said, "It's just a run-of-the-mill story about a farmer, throwing seed willy-nilly." But I bet somebody put two and two together and said, "You know, either that's a really bad farmer—farmers just don't launch their seed willy-nilly like that—or Jesus is trying to teach us about something else."

So what? What would you have thought? Again, you didn't have the answer key. What kind of real-life thing is Jesus talking about? You teachers probably hear it

as talking about different kinds of students. Some get it, some don't. If you're an entrepreneur, maybe it's about different kind of products—you try this, that, and the other thing and something finally takes off. Each of us can imagine how to fit the story to the real world.

But it turns out that Jesus' story is about none of those things. Not a life lesson about teaching or business or farming even. In fact, it turns out that Jesus' story is about the last thing we'd guess. When the disciples come to Jesus and press Him for the answer key, it turns out the story is about Jesus Himself. It's about Jesus Himself, this great sower, launching His kingdom seed, His Gospel, His forgiveness, His grace, His mercy, His promise of eternal life, and it starts right now! Which is the last thing it's supposed to be about—at least the last thing I want it to be about—because that stuff, the Jesus stuff, is supposed to work all the time. If I'm batting .250 as a door-to-door salesman, that puts me in the hall of fame. But Jesus launching the Word of God and whiffing 3 out of every 4 at-bats? How come everyone doesn't get it?

Our text begins with the words, "That same day." Looking back, we discover that same day the Pharisees—whom we've been trained not to like, but the Pharisees were the good guys, with lifelong, perfect Sunday School attendance—the Pharisees (!) called Jesus the devil. Also on that same day the woman who carried Jesus for nine months in her womb, His own mother, along with His brothers, think Jesus is off His rocker. They don't get it. Why not? In fact, Jesus probably figures one of the reasons the people are coming to Him is they want to know, How come everyone doesn't get it? How come of all people, your mother, your brothers, the Pharisees, don't get it?

That is interesting in itself. But even more interesting to you, you may be asking, Why is it that the people whom you love don't get it? Or to bring it even closer to home (which is where we should bring it every time we read God's Word), Why don't you get it? Why don't I get it? Why doesn't the seed bear fruit the way it is supposed to *in me*?

If you're familiar with the parable, you've probably heard before that it's about these four soils. Maybe you've even heard sermons on how it's about four different kinds of people. It's probably more the case that all of those soils, at least most of them, are in all of us. It would actually be more true-to-life with lawns I'm familiar with. I grew up having to mow a lawn in Coleman, Texas, that had all kinds of soil. There were those patches of ground that didn't have any kind of soil at all, so that when I went over it with the lawn mower, for about thirty seconds I was Pig-Pen from Peanuts, enveloped in this massive cloud of smoke. (And I had asthma, which meant I wore an N-95 before it was cool.) And then there was the steep hill that, since my mower wasn't one of those high-tech self-propelled ones, I had to get a running start at to get up. Weeds and thorns, of course, and then there were plenty of patches that were packed as hard as the pavement and just as inhospitable to growth. All three of those in my very, very fouled up lawn. It's one of the things about my childhood I'm not nostalgic about. And maybe, subconsciously, part of the reason is that fouled up lawn is such a picture of myself. You and I are spiritually fouled up lawns.

Look at Jesus' words. "Anyone who hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it...This is what was sown along the path." According to my Greek-English dictionary, that word that gets translated "understand" means most commonly "to have an intelligent grasp of something that challenges or changes one's thinking or practice."

Oof. Does God's Word actually challenge or change my thinking and practice? Or do I let the devil use it, the way most of us use the Internet 95% of the time, which is more or less to confirm what I already think and want to keep on thinking. How convenient it is that God and I so often agree!

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.

How many times after a rousing Easter service, after some mountaintop experience, maybe when you were young at some youth group event, or after some inspiring sermon, so often you've gone away with joy, with great resolve, and you think what? "Now, everything is finally going to change!" Only it fizzles and you go back to the vicious gossip or the bottle or the computer screen or the bitter tongue in no time at all.

Thorns. The worries of the world. Jesus says they "choke" out what God's seed has begun. Why do we worry about the things we worry about? Why do I care about the stuff I care about? I don't want to care about it, but I can't stop caring about it—the worries, the anxieties, keeping up with them and these appearances that choke the joy out of even the best of God's gifts.

You see what I mean when I say we are a horribly fouled up lawn, all kinds of dirt in us? And, yes, if you're keeping score, I did fail to mention the fourth kind of soil that Jesus mentions and, yes, I did have that kind of soil in the lawn that I used to have. We had a one long patch about 5 by 20 that was just beautiful. A little gully with lots of moisture under some shade, this soft, green, luscious grass, that you could walk on in your bare feet, if you were willing to walk over the horrible lawn to get there. Good soil.

I didn't mention that kind of soil on purpose, because I was afraid that if I did, we'd start doing something that Jesus doesn't want us to do. We'd have a little powwow about how we can make ourselves into better soil, maybe come up with a list of Christian composts and holy herbicides or something like that. But that's exactly the opposite of what Jesus does. He talks about these kinds of soils, yes. He describes how fouled up our lawns are, but it's not as though there's anything any of us can do about it. That's because Jesus doesn't want you and me to spend too much time lamenting poor soil conditions.

You may have heard this parable identified somewhere, and I've read this even in learned commentaries, as the "Parable of the Four Soils." That's not very learned. In fact, that's absolutely the dumbest title for this parable that you could come up with. There is no excuse for it. You can be excused for calling the Parable of the Waiting Father the Parable of the Prodigal Son. You can be excused for calling the Parable of the Seeking Shepherd the Parable of the Lost Sheep. But here, calling this the Parable of the Four Soils there is no excuse for. Because Jesus Himself—and this may be the only one—Jesus Himself tells us the name of this parable. In His answer key, He says, "Hear the parable of the sower." I think Jesus does that on purpose, because He knows we're going to want to make this all about us. He knows we're going to want to start thinking about all our fouled up soils and how to fix it and what we can do and the bootstraps we can pull up. But He says, "Hear the Parable of the Sower."

What does the *Sower* do? The sower sows. The sower sows the seed. Where does He sow the seed? The sower sows the seed everywhere! Willy-nilly! He sows the seed everywhere. How much? How much seed should the sower sow if the sower

should sow seed? When it comes to fouled up lawns like you and me, the sower sows as much as it needs and as long as it takes. Do you see how this works? Jesus gives no real answer. He rarely does when people come to Him with questions. He hardly ever answers the question they ask. He gives no real reason—no satisfying one, anyway—why the Pharisees, and for a while His mom, don't get it, why some get it, some don't. No real answer why it does not take root in you and me like it should. And then He doesn't ask you to spend too much time fussing about it. He just sows the seed and never stops.

The Pharisees call him the devil; he casts out a demon. Seed sown. His mother and brothers call him nuts. He says, "You haven't seen the half of it. You think that's nuts? I am so nutty, I'm going to go on loving this world of name-callers until every single one of them is my mother and my brother and my sister." And then when this whole darn world is so fouled up, when it's such a fouled up lawn, when no one gets it, save maybe the one guy to his right, what's the sower do? The sower sows the seed. The dying sower sows "Father, forgive them" into the ears of the very people who are watering the earth with His blood.

The sower just sows. And you, just as you're sitting there, lamenting the sorry state of your lawn, God says, "Hey, dirtbag, over here." And you lift up your head, and he blasts you in the face with a big handful of Jesus seed: "You are mine. All mine!" Just as you're about to call it quits, this fellow dirtbag in the white robe hits you in the face with another handful of Jesus seed: "In the name of Jesus, I declare to you the full and free forgiveness of all your sins." The sower sows! And He sows and He sows and He sows as Jesus goes and goes and goes and He's not very careful and He's still

sowing. And, yes, once in a while that seed takes deep root; the fact that you are here—and praise God for it—means that seed has taken root in you! But even if what has grown up so far should wither, the sower sows. I'll be here next week—I or Pastor Douthwaite or someone else—to hit you in the face with another fistful of seed, more grace, more mercy, more forgiveness, to toss another handful of the Gospel into your ears, “You are forever mine.” Even into your mouth and into your heart more Body and Blood, Jesus seed. For your forgiveness and for your life and for your salvation.

The sower sows. Praise God that the sower sows and that no lawn is too fouled up for Him!

Pastor Brent McGuire  
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church