

The Parable of the Sower

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[0:00] Redeemer. Amen. Please be seated. As for that in the good soil, there are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

! Luke 8.15. Last Sunday's readings, lessons, invited us, a Shilvia Epistle and the Gospel readings. Those two readings invited us to battle and to labor as followers of Jesus Christ.

To battle and to labor. Remember, this Sunday's readings emphasize the warning against trusting in anything that we do.

The intrusion of self in any form will spoil our Lenten discipline. So as we prepare for Lent, we ought to be mindful of that. The intrusion of self.

[1:12] And it seems sort of counterintuitive because really what we're doing in Lent is exactly looking at ourself, isn't it? Rummaging through our stuff.

As we've, I've been using this analogy, you know, taking out the things that will weigh us down for the journey. And then taking on and putting on the things that will help us in the journey, in our pilgrimage.

But here, there's also the warning, though, that we can be too overly preoccupied with the self, even in this Lenten season. And what that looks like is because then we start to either, either, there's two things we can do when we get preoccupied with ourself.

We can become too arrogant. I'm doing it, I'm, I'm, man, I am, I'm doing so well. I'm so good. I'm keeping all the Lenten discipline. I'm telling, God deserves, you know, God should be happy with what I have to offer. You know, that's, that's the arrogance and the pride that comes in.

[2:15] That's the one aspect of it. All we can, the opposite spectrum can come along. We can become wracked with guilt. I can't, I just can't help myself. I keep stumbling.

Even though I know this should be my Lenten discipline, I can't keep it, I can't keep up. I'm such a failure. God must be angry with me. How could he even love me?

These two are two sides of the same coin. Because ultimately what you're doing is your self, your works, your merits has become the focus of your standing before God.

And so we must be careful that the self does not intrude too far. Because it will, as this reverend says, will spoil our Lenten discipline.

So the spirit of self-seeking, self-trust, self-righteousness will stain our sacrifice and make it unacceptable to God.

[3:20] As we see in our gospel reading this morning. The sower sows the seed and brings it into contact with the soil.

But growth depends on who? On God. Growth depends on the soil.

And that is God's choosing. Not a day goes by that we are not reminded, if we are honest with ourselves, that we live in a world that is enslaved to sin. We see that in our own flesh.

And we see it all around us. We live in a world that is enslaved to sin. And although the seed of the gospel goes out. And is freely and widely broadcast.

Human weakness and stubbornness keep it from bearing fruit. As Luther, Martin Luther rightly stated in his hymn. Did we in our own strength confide?

[4:20] Our striving will be losing. Essentially what he is saying, which the Bible agrees with him. And that is where he got it from. Is this.

We have no power inherent in us. We have no power native to us. To do battle. And to defeat the unyielding enemies that we face.

And what are those three enemies? There is the unvoli trinity, as I like to call them. The devil, the flesh, and the world. None of us have any power inherent in us to face and defeat these great enemies.

These great enemies. Nevertheless, St. Paul shows us in this epistle reading that we have this morning. How we are to fight.

And where we are to place our confidence as we do the fight. The power of grace reaches its fullness in the life of Paul. And he is a perfect example for us in this.

[5 : 22] The power of God's grace reaches its fullness in the weakness of inherited sinfulness. We have this body of flesh and clay that is prone to sin.

Prone to stumble. Prone to leave the God we love. But yet we have the more powerful power of God. And his gracious disposition towards us.

And his power is made perfect even in our weakness. That's the example that Paul shows us. So then we can joyfully declare along with St. Paul. If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

I will all the more gladly boast of my weakness that the power of Christ may rest on me. That's what Paul says.

This Sunday, the expression of the Christian's true condition is this. In spite of our sinful weaknesses, we feel the growth of grace in us when we are tethered.

[6 : 32] That is, connected to Christ. In spite of our natural native weaknesses, we feel the growth of grace when we are tethered and connected to Christ.

Because he is our surety. He is our guarantor. And so St. Paul, who is a sower of the word, as this parable shows, stands before us as an example.

He incorporates faith. Then Christ, who is the preeminent sower, and he is the sower of life, meets us and brings us peace.

So St. Paul is our teacher this morning. He is an example of such a one whose life is spread out in the service of Christ. Paul's life, in its breadth and height and depth, was totally devoted since his conversion on the road to Damascus.

Completely sold out, devoted to Jesus Christ. We see that in the epistle reading, don't we? He stands before us as an example of someone who, while doing everything for Christ, trusted in nothing that he did.

[7 : 45] But exhibited the very spirit of the collect, the prayer that we have of the day this morning. This is Paul's prayer. Oh Lord God, you see that we put no trust in anything that we do.

If anyone has a right to put any trust in anything they've done, it's probably Paul. He's done a lot.

But he says, you see that we put no trust in anything that we do. That would be Paul's prayer.

That's Paul's prayer, based on this epistle. And then he says, mercifully grant that by your power and by your merit, we may be defended against all adversity through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul's life was a life of deep humility. You know, he writes in the second epistle to Corinthians.

Unfortunately, you remember when we went to the first Corinthians?

He had to write another letter to them, second Corinthians. And unfortunately, to the great tragedy, the problems that were going on in the Corinthian church were still existing. In fact, more and more, they are starting to even deride and make fun of Paul and his weaknesses.

[8 : 55] And so he writes to them. Because some people have come alongside them from elsewhere, showing how great they are, and how perfect they are, and how sophisticated they are.

And those are the things that Corinthians put trust in. And so Paul writes in his second letter, he says, this passage especially, most of the whole book of 2 Corinthians, particularly this section, is kind of a self-defense of Apostle Paul to the Corinthian church.

And he speaks of himself as a fool, while asserting his bona fides. But why does he say, I'm a fool?

Because he's saying, look, if you guys want me to do what these guys are doing, and tell you my qualifications, none of them stand. None of them can stand with me, in terms of works for the gospel, and works for Christ.

None of them have done, even close to what I've done. But he says, I'm a fool. Because he's saying, to even do this is foolish. Because it doesn't matter what we've done. That's why, as you read that epistle, Paul can use in the language fool.

[10 : 07] He's saying, it is as foolish to boast in itself. But if you insist, I'll tell you what I've done. If any exception of self-poly was in St. Paul, how much more so in us?

If Paul can say, it's foolish to even boast in the things I've done. How much more so in us? We may speak of ourselves only, as someone puts it.

In comparison to Paul, we may speak of ourselves only when silence will do more harm than speech. And that's what Paul is doing here. He's only speaking of himself because silence will do more harm than speech.

When gentleness is taken for weakness, self-control for indifference, humility for inferiority, it may become our duty, not merely to ourselves, but to others, that we assert not ourselves, but our office, lest our works suffer loss.

That's why Paul is speaking here. And what does he say to them? He tells them of his life of extreme labor. Look at the many dangers Paul listed.

[11:18] Three times I was beaten with rods, he says. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. In an immense Bible study, we just went through Acts 26, one of his, probably the last, the third shipwreck of Paul's journey.

A night and a day I was adrift at sea. On frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, dangers from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers, in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

This is the life of extreme labor. Paul has lived ten lifetimes of danger for the sake of the gospel. And he says, not only have I lived a life of extreme labor, but my life is full of self-denial, continual self-denial.

It's the willing endurance of weariness as he endures all of these things. Pain, nightly wakefulness. Imagine what Paul looks like after all of this.

[12:43] Imagine the toll, not only in his body, but in his mind. Later in the epistles, we're meant to understand that Paul was almost blind.

So that he needed an amanuensis, somebody who would write, and just dictate his letters, in his life. Why was he almost blind? It's not because of necessarily old age, probably because of the many beatings, stoned.

He was stoned, and left for dead. The only reason they stopped it was they thought he was dead. Three times. He was beaten, lashed.

Thirty-nine lashes. Five times, actually. Yeah. It was three times. So you can see the toll of this on St. Paul's life.

There's a wakefulness, starvation, voluntary fastness, cold and nakedness, clothes worn and torn, crushing burdens upon him. In the midst of it all, fearful inward burdens.

[13:49] What was he burdened by? He was burdened by the daily pressure on him of his anxiety for all the churches that he's planted. He was anxious that they remain faithful.

Here is a life of a man who is bearing and sharing in the suffering of Christ. This burden was made still heavier by personal infirmities, which made a life, a trial for him.

But here we see Paul combine the fullest activity with the deepest, deepest humility. He is a man who had special visions from God, revelations from God.

He saw things that no one else has seen. He said in one of his letters, he was taken to the deep, the high heavens. But yet, here is a man who trusted not in himself or in even the things he's seen.

He trusted in Christ to do all for him and to do all in him and to do all by him. And Christ did it. Christ used this man in his weakness and his humility to make his power perfect.

[15:03] Christ used him. He offered his best to the Lord. Not him, though, as he would say, but Christ who lived in him.

Paul is a fitting example for us of Lenten effort, Lenten discipline. Lenten discipline. He's a great example of Lenten discipline. But he's also an example of us of Lenten humility.

You know, it's so easy for us and it's so easy and it's a human tendency to trust in ourselves rather than in God. Whether it be for our salvation or for even gospel ministry or for our worldly needs and the needs of the world.

The human mind is always that of self-reliance. It's part of the effects of the fall. And it's so easy to do that.

But rather, what we're meant to do and we're called to do as followers of Jesus Christ is to turn away from ourselves and to turn to Christ. All these things require our action.

[16:13] We must ultimately trust in the one who holds the world in his hands and who promises my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness.

That's what your Lord promises you. This is what he says. I will say it again. My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Let's look at the gospel reading. Last Sunday, if you remember, the Holy Gospel taught us that God calls men to labor in his kingdom.

And today, the parable of the sower brings before us the need for effort as we work in God's vineyard with the many dangers that may come as we work. As we work with all the dangers and with all the enemies that we face, we must do so as a Christian trusting, not in our own work, but in Christ.

This parable is very familiar to us, I'm sure. The parable of the sower. But I think that we too easily see it when we read it. We too easily see this parable as a feel-good parable.

[17 : 31] In fact, it's not feel-good at all. It's a dial reality that's shown to us of the work of the Gospel that Christ calls us to. It is a realistic view of the Gospel work.

And yes, we are all called into this work of the Gospel without exception. Telling the world of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not just the job of the pastor or a special group of, you know, super Christians and the Church.

It is the job of all Christians. And it's a job that our risen Lord commanded us to do. All of us. It's a command to the whole Church.

But as we see in this parable this morning, Jesus Christ is the actual sower in this parable. He's the preeminent sower. He's the one who was sent by God to preach good news of the Gospel to the world.

He's the first sower. And He went about, Jesus did, preaching, broadcasting the Gospel as He went.

[18 : 43] He is also, in fact, the seed that is being sown. Because the Gospel message is about Him. He's the content of the Gospel message.

It is faith in His meritorious work for us that takes root in a believer's heart and grows and bears fruit in many folds. So Christ is both sower and seed.

And as I said previously, we must understand this parable rightly if we want to benefit from it. So the question for us is then, how does the Gospel grow? Well, firstly, it grows through the widespread and indiscriminate sowing of seeds.

Do you notice in this parable? The sower sows widespread and indiscriminately.

He didn't go searching. Oh, well, I think that deserves good seed. Oh, no, I don't want to throw my seed to those people. It's not worthy of the seed.

[19 : 54] No. There's a widespread proclamation of the Gospel indiscriminate. It is what we call the free offer of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And we must have that attitude, brothers and sisters. No one is beyond the saving grace of God. No one is too far gone. If you're not too far, if you were not too far gone, no one else is.

You must think like Paul. You being the chief of sinners, if Christ in His mercy can draw you out of your murray clay, bring you from death to life, you can do so for anyone else.

So it is faith. So that's how the Gospel grows. It is the widespread discrimination, but it's also divine intervention. It takes divine intervention for the seed to take root and to grow and to bear fruit.

It takes divine intervention. Those are the two things that are necessary. And we see that in this parable. Because look at the parable. 25% of the seeds I'm sorry, 75% of the seeds didn't bear fruit.

[21 : 06] And if you think about that, no business school would have endorsed such an enterprise or considered it a success. What do you mean? I gave you, you know, \$100 worth of seeds and 75% of it was sunk.

But that's not so with the Gospel. that is the, and yet also, that is the reality of Gospel work, the Gospel work of our Lord. And that's what God wants us to see with unvanishing eyes, the reality of Gospel work.

There are four types of soil that we see in this parable and only one bears fruit. The other three are examples of fruitless hearing. Notice that they're all heard. Do you notice that when Jesus explains? They're all heard. It's not about not hearing. They're all heard. Every single soil heard. But only one heard and bore fruit.

And it's important to note that. So let's look at this fruitless, fruitless listening that happens. The first is verse 12. The ones along the path are those who have heard.

[22:19] Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved. What's at work there? What's at work there? Is satanic deception? Satan is at work in the world.

He hates the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And he's at work so that it will not even take root. He's roaming toe and fro.

He's the great deceiver. The father of lies, the Bible tells him. A roaring lion. The devil is actively at work in the world.

And it's to our detriment when we act as if he's not. And I think that's what writ large in the Western world. We've sort of, you know, we've just taken the devil as, you know, he's a comic book character.

He's a sympathetic character for TV shows now. Whereas, he's the great enemy. He's at work. And we must be aware of it.

[23:25] We should not cower in fear, rather, we should be aware but not cower in fear. Because greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world. But, awareness of the devil's work will bring us to our knees in prayer.

Cry not to God who rescues and delivers and saves from the clutches of the evil one. And so we see that in verse 12. And then, what is this other soil?

And verse 13, And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. They've heard the word, they receive it with joy, but these have no root.

They believe for a while, and in time of testing, they fall away. These are the testing opposition that comes. Have you ever heard people, they've been presented with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it kind of dawns on them, and they receive it initially with sort of joy and interest, but then, when they realize the call of the gospel, that the call of Christ is to come and die, to come and die to sell the flesh, rises up.

I don't want to give that up. I don't want to do that. I don't want to be dependent on God. I don't want to be obedient to God. I don't want to give up my girlfriend that I'm sleeping with without, I said I'm married, even though God's word, I'm convinced that God's word is against it.

[25:00] I don't want to give up this other lifestyle that is outside of God's will, and the flesh cries out in opposition. And although they receive it with joy initially, it has no root.

So they cannot be, and they fall away. And then there's the third soil, verse 14. As for what fell among the thorns, this looked promising initially.

There are those who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. These are worldly distractions. They hear the word, it starts to grow seemingly, takes root to some extent, but then it's choked by thorns.

And what does Jesus say the thorns are? They're the cares of this world, the riches and pleasures of life. And so their fruit does not mature. Unfortunately, there are many people in the church who are like this.

They hear the word, it starts to similarly grow, but the cares of the world are more pleasing. The trinkets that the world offers are more pleasing.

[26:19] And in fact, all of us, to some extent, have to face this temptation. The cares of the world. What are the cares of the Lord? Of life? Housing?

Right? Those are real cares. Life, health, education, bills, children, job loss, job promotion. Those are all the cares of the world that comes along.

And they threaten to take our focus away from Jesus Christ. So that it becomes laborious to come to church. It becomes laborious because all those other things take, preoccupy our mind.

Or it could be the riches and pleasures of life. Maintaining the wealth that you have. Lack of weeding comes along. What does that look like?

You know, the pleasure of life. Making sure that you look presentable to those people out there, pleasing the world rather than Christ. Not wanting to lose out.

[27:22] The dangers of prosperity. the pleasures of later years. All of these things threaten to dislodge the seed and keep it from bearing fruit.

And so, what must we do? What must we do as the people of God? We must be attentive to weeding, to use a guided analogy. What happens when you plant and you want it to grow and weeds come along?

As a good gardener, do you just let it be? No, you take the weeds out because you know what it can cause. You weed. And that's what we must do with our own hearts. We must be good gardeners of our own hearts.

Weed, mix the world and commit ourselves to making the destruction of the world go away. So that they do not overgrow the seed and choke it.

We can't do this, of course, in our own power. We must do it. We can only do it by the mercies and grace of God. But he has promised, to help us. He has put us in the means by which he helped us through his word and sacrament.

[28 : 31] So when we do not avail ourselves of sitting under God's word, of partaking with the body of Christ, we leave ourselves open to the world and to the weeds, to choke.

let's look at the last soil, this picture of fruitful hearing. And for that in the good soil, there are those who, they also hear, they hear the world and upon hearing it, they hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with patience.

So notice so far, there's some passivity to all the three soils. But this one, there's some activeness, response to that seed. Right?

They hear it, they hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with patience. First, they hear it. That's vital to bearing good fruit.

If you want to be fruitful and make something of your life in God, you must hear the word. You must sit continually under God's word preached.

[29 : 44] You must read God's word. And as you hear it, not only hear it, but you must hold it.

How do we hold God's word? You sit under it, under the word, you live your life and make decisions according to the word of God that you've heard. That's how we hold it.

You live your life and make decisions for your life in obedience according to the word of God that you've heard. You not only hear it and then just let it go out the other side, and then you hang in with patience.

Constancy. That's the life of a Christian. Obedient, constantly faithful response to the word with humility. It's a long obedience in the same direction.

That is the life of a Christian. Brothers and sisters, we need not ask which state of ground is ours.

That's not the point of this parable really. Because at some points in our life we may resemble these different soils.

[30 : 53] But particularly what we should be asking is how am I the last soil? Because it doesn't matter if you're on the path, on the rocky soil, among the weeds and the thorns.

all of those are destined for destruction. What you must care about is that you are in the good soil. And how can you do that?

By deepening ourselves in God's word. By hearing, holding it, and hanging on with patience. And that's what the colleague says to us this morning.

And as we do so, we do not trust in our own power, in our own effort, in our own strength, but we trust in the almighty strength of God to hold us fast. Brothers and sisters, as you come to the Lord's table this morning, think of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Banished from your mind and your heart any trust in your own strength and your own ability to merit anything before God or to even sustain yourself in this Christian pilgrimage, banish any self-confidence, but come.

[32 : 02] Come to the one who is both sower and seed. Eat the bread and drink the cup, and in doing so, let us proclaim the Lord's death, as St.

Paul invites us to. And as we do that, what do we do when we proclaim the death? That we believe that he has died and satisfied all that is required. Let us trust in his finished and perfect work, once for all offered a cavalry for our redemption.

This is what Lent helps us to do in a more focused way, to do the hard work of weeding, to resist the temptation to trust in our own efforts and merits, and to rest completely on Christ, who is our anchor and stay, who is our hope in life and death.

So let us pray once again. Oh Lord God, help us not to put any trust in anything that we do.

Mercifully, grant that by your power we may be defended against all the adversity that may come our way, the devil, the flesh, and the world.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.