

Sexagesima

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[0:00] Oh Lord God, we thank you for your mercies and for bringing us safely to your house to worship you this morning. We thank you for your word, the good seed, which is scattered abroad.

And we pray now that as it's scattered this morning, I ask, Lord, that you will give us a heart that is ready. Change our hearts to good soil to receive it, that it may bear fruit, Lord.

We ask, Lord, that you will help us to lay aside all the cares and worries of this world. That may keep us from apprehending you in this gospel reading and in the message this morning.

And give us ears to hear. Also pray, Lord, that you be with me as I speak your word. That I will recede in you, Lord Christ, who will be prominent in the power of your Holy Spirit to impart your word, your food for your people.

We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. I want to, this is a very familiar parable that it's probably familiar to all of us.

[1:05] You've heard it many times over. And I just want to read this excerpt from St. Chrysostom, one of the church fathers, concerning this parable.

And I quote, Tell me,

And even if no change, whatever occurs in the soul, this is no fault of the sower, but of those who are unwilling to be changed.

He has done his part. This is an excerpt. And I quote, I'm sorry. I think the sermon is over.

But it isn't. But that's worthy enough to take home right there as a worthy sermon for us. St.

Chrysostom wants us to understand, even as we apprehend this parable of our Lord, the fault is not in the sower.

[4:07] The fault is not in the seed. Keep that in mind as we go through this. And maybe it's an encouragement to you as you now go and sow this good seed.

Your task, your duty is to sow broadly and liberally. Not to prejudice or discriminate. And we'll bear or receive that seed that you're sowing.

So let's look more closely. And just remember, like last Sunday, as we begin this period of, this three-week period before we enter Lent, and as we begin our long journey, really, onto Easter, this second Sunday before Lent, really, is, we see in the church's collect, that is the prayer in the beginning of our service, this prayer places before us a severe warning.

It places it into our mouths as we pray. Oh, Lord God, you see that we put no trust in anything that we do. No trust in anything that we do.

That petition, that prayer, is more searching than it first appears. It does not say merely that we should not trust in our sins.

[5:27] That's not all it's saying. Or we should not trust in our failures. That's not all it's saying. It says more than that. It says that we even must not trust in anything that we do at all.

Not even in our obedience. We don't trust in our obedience. Not even in our labor. We saw that last week. Not even in our devotion. There is something in us, subtle, persistent, and deeply religious, that wants to insert the self into everything.

Self-trust does not only appear in worthiness. It thrives even in the church, in piety. And once the self enters, even the necessary and worthy Lenten discipline that we're meant to undergo, even that becomes corrupted when the self enters.

So the sacrifice is offered during Lent. But it is no longer pure because it doesn't come from a heart that is devoted and resting in God's perfect work, but thinking that we can rest in our own and ourselves.

And so this Sexy Jesimus Sunday, this second Sunday before Lent, God wants to expose this danger in our hearts of exalting ourselves or trusting in ourselves.

[6:51] And He wants to expose it before we even begin the Lenten fast. And so we see in this parable the sovereignty of God's grace. The readings today teach us why grace must be sovereign. Because the human heart is naturally, left to itself, resistant to God. The Word of God is not weak. We've just looked at St. Chrysostom's quote.

The weakness is not in the seed being sown. The gospel is not defective. But the soil into which it is cast is hostile.

It is shallow. It is crowded. And it's vulnerable to attack. That's where the problem lies. So this Sunday, we're meant to humble ourselves at the very beginning of our Christian life.

As we begin, as we think about our Christian life. And we're meant to remind ourselves that hearing rightly, hearing God's Word rightly, is not something we can take credit for.

[7:55] Even listening rightly and apprehending God and the gospel of grace, it is by God's free gift to us. It is God giving us His grace to open our hearts, to turn our hearts of stone, as Chrysostom wonderfully says, to hearts of flesh, of receptive ground, so that the seed and the Word of God may germinate.

And so, our Lord tells a parable. This parable is so familiar, that in fact, I think we're in danger of no longer hearing it. And yet, it's one of the most bracing and unsentimental parables He told.

And it's the truth about how the gospel works, and how the gospel goes forth in the world. In this parable, we're meant to see that Christ Himself is the sower.

He goes out to sow. And how does He sow? He sows lavishly, freely. You're not meant to bring money.

You're not meant to bring anything of your own. Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to the cross I cling. God sows lavishly. He sows freely.

[9:14] And He sows broadly. He does not ration the seed. He does not wait for ideal conditions. He scatters the Word everywhere.

And we're meant to also see that Christ Himself is also the seed. He's both the sower and the seed. The gospel does not merely talk about Him. It gives Him.

When we proclaim the gospel, we're giving Christ. Here, take Christ, the holy hope for humanity. Faith does not take root in ideas or moral resolve.

That's not what faith is. Faith takes root in Christ Himself. Crucified and risen and received by grace. And so, that's what we're meant to see.

In this parable, there's a shocking outcome. When we listen carefully, the outcome is shocking. Because what is the reality? Three out of four soils do not bear fruit.

[10:24] From a human perspective, this is failure. No sensible planner, no sensible farmer would approve this method.

And yet, our Lord offers no apology. This is not a warning about poor sowing. That's not what this parable is about. Rather, it's a revelation about human hearts. The problem is not with the seed, the gospel.

It is with the soil, the human hearts which receive the seed. So, in a word, the parable forces us to confront a truth we would rather avoid. The primary obstacle to the gospel is not lack of opportunity. But resistance. Our own resistance. Or the world's resistance. And so, we're meant to look at these three dangers of fruitless hearing of the gospel.

And the first one is in verse 5. And Jesus explains it in verse 12. The ones along the path are those who have heard. Then the devil comes and takes away the words from their hearts.

[11:36] So that they may not believe and be saved. We see this satanic opposition to the gospel. The first danger is not intellectual doubt. But theft.

It is theft. The word is heard. We're told. And immediately, upon hearing it, the word is assaulted by the devil himself.

The enemy does not wait until belief matures. He comes in. Because he knows the power of the seed. He knows the power of the gospel. So he comes.

He comes in right away. And lays siege. And takes it away. Plucks it away. This should sober us, brothers and sisters. Hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Anytime we hear it. Anytime it is proclaimed. Anytime it is in our hearing. Even the things we're doing today. This morning. As we gather as God's people. On the Lord's day. To hear his word.

[12:35] To worship him. Hearing the word is not a neutral act. It is never a neutral act. Every time the gospel goes forth.

It goes forth in the context of a contested space. There is warfare. Fear. The devil is at work. Making sure that the gospel of life.

The gospel of Jesus Christ does not take root. That should sober us. Not sober us out of fear or despair.

But it should sober us. The second setting that we see. Is this rootlessness. This rootless joy. And so verse 6. Jesus explains in verse 13.

And the ones on the rock are those who. This is the ones who land on the rock. The ones on the rock are those who. When they hear the word. Receive it with joy. But these have no root.

[13 : 33] They receive it with joy. But these have no root. They believe for a while. And in time of testing. Fall away. So we see here.

Others receive the word with joy. They believe. For a while. This is perhaps the most frightening soil. I think. Because it looks so promising at first.

There is enthusiasm. There is warmth. There is an immediate response. But alas. There is no death. So when testing comes.

As it will come. Faith without root. Cannot endure. Here Jesus teaches us something that is essential.

Joy. Is not the same. As endurance. You may receive. The word of God with joy. There may be an emotional response.

[14 : 34] But it's not the same as faithfulness. Fruit. The good fruit. That we will see later. Requires patience. Requires endurance.

It is not fleeting. It's not momentary. And then we will look. At the third soil. Worthly distraction.

Verse 7 and verse 14. Those are the ones who fell among the thorns. And Jesus explains it in verse 14. As for those who. As for what fell among the thorns. They 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. That's the final one.

There's this. There's finally we see this one. There is the slow. The slow suffocating danger. Of the thorns. The cares and riches and pleasures of life.

[15 : 35] Notice how ordinary these are. These pleasures. These cares. These riches of life. They are ordinary things.

Housing. Health. Children. Work. Promotion.

Security. Comfort. Comfort. None of these are sins in themselves.

And yet together. They can choke the life of grace. In us. In us. In us. This danger emerges. Notice that.

There is receptive. Ground. In fact. The soil is received. The seed is growing. But it's so choked up. The danger emerges.

[16 : 31] Our Lord says. As people go on their way. Not in moments of crisis. This. But in the daily life. In the daily life. As the cares of the world.

In your daily life. Comes up. And starts to squeeze the word of life. This gospel. Out. The plant grows. The soil. But so do the weeds.

The thorns. Alongside it. And slowly. Slowly. Imperceptibly. The word is crowded out. The word is crowded out.

And it is choked. Notice here. That all these three. Soils. That do not actually bear good fruit. Upon first.

Upon the broadcast of the seed. Of the. There is hearing. That occurs. There is hearing. The first one hears. The devil quickly plucks it out.

[17 : 34] The second one hears. But it doesn't take root. There is still hearing. And then the third one. The hear. And it starts to grow. But there is too much cares.

And chokes. And thorns around it. Again. This parable shows us. That it's. The problem isn't with. The seed itself. The gospel. Or the sower. It is with the heart.

That receives it. The sower. That receives it. And then lastly. Jesus tells us. Of this. This fruitful hearing. And what does it look like?

The one that hears. And grace endures. First of all. We see that only. It's this. It's this one soil. It's the only soil. That bears fruit. It's the one that bears fruit.

And what does it look like? Then to bear fruit. To be the soil that bears fruit. Jesus gives us. The answer. He says. It's those who hear. Jesus says. Those who hear. All the other ones have also

heard.

[18 : 33] But these ones have heard. And then what? Follows the hearing. Hold fast. The hold fast. To the word that is heard.

And then bear fruit. With what? I love the language that Jesus uses. Bear fruit with patience. Patience. Even this soil is not.

This is what I want us to see in this parable this morning. This soil is not naturally good. That's why I read St. Hercocet's quote in the beginning.

Right? This is. In the spiritual sense. And in terms of the gospel. It is only grace that changes. The heart of stone. Soil.

Where thorns are. Where rock is. Or where. Along the path. It's only the grace of God that can change into good soil. There is no naturally good soil. There are no hearts by nature that receive the word rightly.

[19 : 37] Good soil is made. Not found. Good soil is made. And it's God who makes it.

Good soil is plowed by grace. Deepened by trial. And cleared by repentance. That's what makes a good soil.

And even fruitful hearers do not outgrow dependence. That's the key thing we ought to learn. Are you a fruitful hearer of God's good news? Of the gospel? Are you here today?

And you're a fruitful hearer. Do you think you can outgrow your dependence on God? Who creates and makes your soil good? Please do not think you can.

You must continually. Daily. Depend on him. To tend your soil. Your heart. To do the work.

[20 : 35] That he must do. So that your ears may be ripened. To hear rightly God's word. So that your heart may bend. To God.

Not inward to yourself. So that growth. The good growth. That comes from that. Will not lead to pride. But continually remain humble.

Humble humility before God. God. This gospel leaves us with no room for confidence in ourselves. Not even in our hearing. It's as William Taylor.

An Anglican rector puts it. And he says it. I'm taking this from you. He says. The gospel chorus. The Christian chorus is this. Go on.

Go on. Go on. Go on. Go on. Go on. Go on. Go on. Go on. 125 verses. That is the gospel chorus.

[21 : 39] Go on. Continue. A long obedience. As another pastor puts it. In the same direction. This gospel leaves us with no room for confidence in ourselves.

Not even in our hearing. It leaves us humble. And that's what we see as we turn from the gospel to our epistle reading.

This epistle humbles us as workers. Those who are in the vineyard of God. Who are being tended by God. Who are growing. To be careful not to let the cares and the thorns of the world choke that growth.

But also to remain humble. As God does his work in us. We look at St. Paul in 2 Corinthians. As he speaks of himself. Of his own life. And he says to us in this passage that he hates doing so.

Because it seems like he's priding himself. But he calls it folly. To take pride in himself. But he's doing something. He's really actually attacking false teachers.

[22 : 49] Who have come along to the Corinthians. And so lies among them. These false teachers boast in their own virtues. And Paul wants to show them that silence and humility is the only ground by which the gospel is allowed to grow.

And so Paul in turn boasts. And so Paul in turn boasts. But let's look at what he boasts in. He doesn't boast as they do. We see in Paul a life of deep humility.

Paul does not defend himself by claiming superiority. Even though he has grounds to claim superiority. Rather he exposes the very idea of self-assertion as foolish.

If asserting oneself was folly for an apostle. One of the premier apostles. If he cannot assert himself. How much more for us.

On what grounds can we lay claim to self-pride? You know there are moments when it becomes necessary not to assert ourselves. But our calling lest the work itself be damaged.

[24 : 02] Is this. Even then. Even in those moments. The Christian speaks. Even at moments when. I'm sorry. What I meant to say is that there are moments when it becomes necessary to assert ourselves.

Rather. But even in those moments. When we do so. When we speak. We do so reluctantly. We do so without self-reliance. We do so.

We have feet firmly planted on God's word. And God's truth. We derive our authority. Such as it is. From God's word.

Not from ourselves. That is a much surer footing. To stand on. And that's what Paul is doing here.

So Paul goes on to list. His sufferings.

His beatings. His shipwrecks. Shipwrecks. Dangers. Ungers. Sleeplessness. Exposure. So. It means. It seems. If you read.

[24 : 59] As you heard that passage being read. By Carol earlier. In 2 Corinthians 11. Seems like Paul maybe had like three or four lives. Not one person could have suffered and endured all of that.

And beyond all this. And beyond all this. Paul talks about the inward burden that he has. The daily anxiety that he had.

For the churches of God that he's planted. That he's been appointed by God to be an overseer over. And add to all of that. So that we know that Paul is human like us.

Add to all of those worries. Are then his own personal infirmities. There is a man. A true man. His own personal infirmities and weaknesses.

Life itself was a trial for this apostle. And yet Paul trusted in none of it. He didn't lay claim on. Look at all the things I'm suffering for you Lord.

[26 : 02] Look at all the things I've accomplished for you. Here is the Christian paradox laid bare before us. Maximum effort.

Without self-trust. Or self-pride. Is the Christian's model. We are meant to work in God's vineyard. With maximum effort. With all the power he's given us. With all the strength he's given us. To labor for his goodness. For the advancement of his gospel.

To build one another up. As we are gathered here. As the house of God. To help each other.

Become more and more like Jesus Christ.

Maximum effort is required to do that. From all of us. Because we are all important. Integral parts of the body. But as we do that.

[27 : 04] As we do all of that. We must do it without self-trust. We must do it without self-pride.

Paul says of himself.

I worked hard of the most. And yet. I relied. On my work. Less than all. Paul. And Paul now boasts. In something else. He boasts in God's grace. That is perfected. In his weakness. Paul boasts. Not in what he has done. But he boasts in what he lacks.

He boasts. In his weakness. Because he knows that. It is that place of weakness. That God's strength. Is perfected. That is the place where Christ's power rests.

It is in his dependence. On God. That's where God. Can use him. This is the same logic we saw. In the parable reading that we had.

[28 : 07] Fruit comes. The fruit. The fruitful soil. Comes. Not from human strength. Where does the fruit come? Where does the growth happen? It comes from grace.

That endures. In weakness. It comes. From abiding. In Christ.

And so. We're shown this morning. What we may not trust in. We must not trust in anything we do. However sincere.

However sacrificial. However faithful. We are men. And we are called to do all of those things. But we may not trust in them. What then must we trust in?

Brothers and sisters. We trust. In the power of God. To defend us against every danger. External and internal.

[29 : 11] Do you know that? God is powerful. And he's present with you. To defend you from every danger. Both external. Those thorns and cares of the world.

The riches of the world. As you abide in God's word. He's powerful to keep those thorns. From choking out the gospel. As you remain rooted in him. He's able and powerful to protect you.

From the danger of the evil one. The devil. The great enemy of your soul. Who wants to come and pluck out. The good gospel of Christ. The deposit of God in you. He's able and powerful to defend you.

He's able to defend you. From yourself. Your own weaknesses. To fall away. To receive with joy. But not to persist. He's able and powerful to help you.

To continue. To remain. Until the very end. And so. To trust in ourselves.

