

Parable of the Sower

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Preacher: Rev. Dr. Felix Orji

- [0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Our Father, we confess that we have surrounded ourselves with gods and goddesses, and we are surrounded by denials and distortions of the gospel.
- And now we ask you for the gift of your Holy Spirit to help us understand your word and to obey your word. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
- Amen. Please be seated. I think for those of you who are interested in the Euro Cup, it comes up at 12 noon, and we're going to finish before then.
- I know there's one that starts at 1145, but it's full of 15 minutes of nothing, so I wait for the 12 noon. Today is not my last Sunday here, but today is my last sermon here at St. John's.
- And before I get into the passage, I want to say a few things to all of us here gathered this Sunday. First of all, I want to thank all of you for listening to my preaching.
- [1 : 2 6] I've been here for six years, and I've gone back to look at some of my sermon notes six years ago, five years ago, and I wonder why you sat there and listened to it. For one thing, most of them were very long.
- Actually, my very first sermon here at St. John's was Sunday night. Dan had called me in my former parish and said I wanted to preach. That was in June of 1998.
- And I was supposed to preach on Genesis chapter 2. So I preached for 40 minutes that night. I said everything I knew about marriage, and a lot of things I did not know about marriage.
- And I felt very good about it. But I want to thank you for your generosity, for helping me grow in my faith, for helping me grow in my life as a preacher of the gospel.
- I have received lots of positive feedback and negative feedback that have helped me in growing as a preacher of the gospel. So thank you very much.
- [2 : 3 8] I also want to encourage you, secondly, to keep focused on the word of God. God's word is the fundamental and most important primary thing that we need as individual Christians and that we need as a congregation.
- God has given us a mission in this church to believe in the gospel, to obey the gospel, and to proclaim the gospel in the midst of trials, temptations, and troubles.
- Third, I want to encourage you as a congregation and as individuals to also stay focused on the need for the power of the Holy Spirit.
- We have the word of God, but we need the power of the Holy Spirit for the word to be alive in our lives. If Jesus, the Son of God, needed the power of the Holy Spirit, we ourselves desperately need the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus had the word of God, and yet he needed the power of the Spirit. And if that was the case for him, it is far much more for all of us here in the 21st century.
- [4 : 0 4] We need the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to open ourselves to the power of the Spirit of God. We should not let the Holy Spirit be too small in our lives and in the life of this congregation.

So I invite you to open yourselves to the fire of the Spirit, to the power of the Spirit, to the healing of the Holy Spirit of God.

And God will have surprises for all of us. And finally, I want to ask for your forgiveness. I've been around for six years, and in the course of six years of ministry, I am bound to have offended some of you, and I want to ask you for forgiveness.

And I also offer my forgiveness to those of you who have offended me. You do not need to come to me to ask for forgiveness.

I extend it to you. Forgiveness is a gift of grace. I want to thank you for your forgiveness as I extend my forgiveness and God's forgiveness to all of us.

[5 : 23] My prayer is that God will bless our journeys together as we all head together toward the Holy City, the New Jerusalem.

Thank you. So that was the homily. So I'm going to get into the sermon. I want to make sure that I retain the title for being the longest preacher at St. John's.

I will not let Harry Robinson or Jim Packer take that title from me. So, the parable of the sower, Luke chapter 8, verses 1 to 15.

And that can be found on page 63 in the New Testament of the section of your Pure Bibles. Luke chapter 8, page 63.

When I was a teenager, just growing up in the Roman Catholic Church, I think I had some sort of romantic and idealistic view of the ordained ministry.

[6 : 33] I thought and believed that clergy and pastors were somewhat angelic. They were angelic beings sent from heaven down here with some human skin on them.

And of course, I was under the illusion that because they were clergy, everybody in church would listen to them. I tried as a teenager to listen to the priests in my parish, and I thought that was the case with everyone in church.

But somehow, that illusion was shattered one evening when the local priest came to my father who was the chair of parish council.

And they talked from about 9 o'clock to 12 midnight. And I wanted to hear what they were talking about. So I hid behind the wall and listened.

And this priest was complaining to my dad about his frustration and his disappointment with the congregation. He was disappointed that the church was not sufficiently responsive to the preaching of the word of God.

[7 : 49] And as I listened and listened and listened, I was terribly disillusioned about the ministry. From that moment, my sense of the angelic nature of ministry dropped.

And of course, and I thought to myself, I would never be a priest. I would never enter the ministry. And not long after that, I had some discussions with my dad.

And he helped me to understand that in the ministry of the gospel, there will be joys and frustrations and disappointments and blessings.

This is true for each and every one of us as individuals. And this is true for you as a congregation in your call to proclaim the gospel in the Anglican Church.

I learned that God's ways are not my ways and his thoughts are not my thoughts. As the heavens are far above the earth, so are God's thoughts and ways different and far from mine and from all of us.

[9 : 06] And I'm very grateful to God that those illusions were shattered. And I think in a sense this is what is happening in this parable. Jesus is shattering some illusions about the kingdom of God, about the message that he was preaching.

the crowd had heard. The crowd had seen that Jesus was casting out devils and demons.

They had heard that Jesus was healing the sick and raising the dead. And with great authority, Jesus was proclaiming the kingdom of God.

Jesus said the kingdom of God is at hand. And the people felt something electric, supernatural in the air.

And the Bible says in verse 4 that the crowd came together and people from town after town. They had heard the news. The kingdom of God is at hand.

[10 : 12] And here Jesus is healing the sick. Jesus is raising the dead. Jesus is casting out demons. Something is about to happen. And they came from one town after the other and came to hear from Jesus.

There was great anticipation that the kingdom of God is breaking in. And so as they came with such anticipation of some sort of great apocalyptic eruption of the power of God, Jesus needed to speak to them and give them a dose of realism and dispel the illusion of some sort of supernatural takeover of God in the nation.

In other words, Jesus is trying to say here that the kingdom that he was preaching was supposed to work in a different way. The word of God that he was preaching was going to work in a different way.

God was not going to sweep everybody into the kingdom of God and destroy the oppressors. And I think in those days it was the Italians, the Romans.

No offense to the Italians. God does not work that way. And so Jesus tells them a parable. He tells the crowd a parable.

[11 : 37] And I want to point out three things about this parable. The first is that God's kingdom grows through the preaching of the word of God. God's kingdom grows through the preaching of God's word.

In other words, entrance into the kingdom of God is by faith and obedience to the word of God. You see, for some of the people in the crowd listening to Jesus, they thought that the kingdom of God would be ushered in by some sort of military power or by some sort of supernatural manifestation of God.

But Jesus was saying to them, God's kingdom is going to be ushered in through the proclamation of the word of God.

So the seed is the word of God. The seed of the kingdom is the word of God. And I think this is the fundamental secret of the kingdom.

God is going to build his kingdom. God is going to grow his kingdom through the proclamation, the belief, and obedience to the word of God.

[12 : 51] There is no other way. And I think it is a message that we need to hear as individuals, and it is a message that we need to hear as a congregation and as a denomination.

It is not through social activism or traditions of men or traditions of the church or the doctrines of men that God is going to build his kingdom. God will build his kingdom through the proclamation of the word of God.

And that is what Jesus was trying to get across to the crowd. Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, as the king of Israel, was not going to destroy people and usher his kingdom that way.

It is through the sowing of the seed. And so whenever we are tempted to sidestep God's word, we are sidestepping the growing of his kingdom in our own lives and in the life of our congregation.

God's strategy for building his kingdom, God's strategy for transforming the world is through the preaching of the word. God's word is small, but it is powerful.

[14 : 12] The preaching of the gospel is slow and hard work and gradual, but it is effective and it does change lives. It has changed your life.

It's changed my life. life. And that is why Paul, writing to Timothy, said to him, preach the word in season and out of season.

And I want to encourage you as a congregation this morning that we need confidence. We need confidence in the power of the word of God.

God, we need to be steadfast and be focused on the preaching of that word. The temptations are there every single day of our lives to think that the word of God is not effective.

And we are being told by the intellectuals out there and by the marketers out there that we need to reframe the word of God. You know, we need to step aside from the word of God.

[15 : 19] What we need is charismatic personalities. You know, people larger than size personalities in order for the word of God to come through. We need a new language for the kingdom of God to grow.

That is not true. I am not sure that the changing of our Christian language is going to bring people to Christ. You see, the reason why Jesus was persecuted and crucified was not because people did not understand what he was saying.

he was actually crucified because they understood what he was saying. And so I am not convinced that the change or the rejection of the word of God is going to change lives.

I am not convinced and the Bible is not. And so brothers and sisters, God's kingdom grows through the proclamation of the word of God and we must continue to believe and proclaim that word.

Secondly, God's word will not be received by some who hear that word. The word of God will not be received, it will not bear fruit in the lives of some people who hear that word.

[16 : 38] God is powerful, God can do all things, but there is at least one thing that he will not do. God will not force his word on anybody.

And that is why the word of God is going to be unfruitful in some people's lives. And of course, Jesus' implication here is that if the kingdom grows by the word of God and if some people will not receive that word, then some people will not be part of the kingdom of God.

That is the logic. If the kingdom of God grows by the word of God, and if some people will not receive the word of God, then it is clear that those people will not be part of the kingdom of God.

You see, the crowd needed to hear that because some of them believed that because they were, the children of Abraham, they were going to get into the kingdom no matter what.

It's by their pedigree and religious affiliation. But Jesus is saying your pedigree and religious affiliation and zeal is not going to get into the kingdom because the kingdom grows by the word of God.

[17 : 58] And if you do not listen to the word of God and accept the word of God, you will not be part of the kingdom. And why is that?

Why would some hearers of the word of God not listen and believe the word of God in order to be part of the kingdom? And what Jesus does here is to give us three illustrations or three reasons why people will not hear and receive the word and be part of the kingdom.

The first reason is hardness of heart. hardness of heart. Look at verse 5. Jesus said a sower went out to sow his seed and as he sowed some fell along the path and was trodden underfoot and the birds of the air devoured it.

Skip to verse 12, the interpretation. The ones along the path are those who have heard then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts and they may not believe and be saved.

Jesus is saying here that when the word of God falls into the heart of a person who is represented by the path, that word will not be fruitful.

[19 : 27] Their heart is as hard as the path. This is about resistance to the word of God.

It's about being stiff necked about God's word. It's about people not seeing any need for God at all. And you find people like that in the secular society, you also find them in the church.

Hardness of heart. And sometimes the hardness of heart comes as a result of intellectual pride and indifference and boredom and anger towards God and self-righteousness.

For people like that, the Bible is boring, preaching is boring, the whole thing makes no sense to them. And so the word of God bounces off their backs and they don't sense their sense of danger.

And all that time they think they are in control. You know, they say to you, I do not want to believe in the word of God because it makes no sense to me.

[20 : 37] And they think they are in control. But the reality of the passage is this, they are not in control. The Bible says that the devil takes the word from them.

The devil takes charge. And that is what hardness of heart causes. in the lives of people. The devil comes in and takes the word from them and begins to run their lives into the life of rebellion.

And I think this is why we need to constantly pray for ourselves and pray for those relatives and colleagues and friends of yours. The devil is active.

And it's difficult for our modern society to actually come to grasp with that because the devil no longer exists. But the Bible says that the devil is alive and active and still in the word of God from the hearts of people who have hardened their hearts towards God.

If Jesus himself was not immune from the temptation of Satan, if Peter the apostle and Judas Iscariot were not immune from the temptation of Satan, nobody is immune from Satan's temptation to take the word away.

[21 : 56] And so we must be on guard and make sure that our hearts are not hard towards God. Second, I call this superficiality.

There is hardness of heart and there is superficiality of heart. And I want us to look at verse 6 of the same passage. And some seed fell on the rock and as it grew up it withered away because it had no moisture.

Skip to the interpretation of verse 13. And the ones on the rock are those who when they hear the word receive it with joy but these have no root.

They believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. these are those who represent the seed sown on the rock.

They are superficial. It's shallow. They hear the word of God. There is excitement about it and they believe it that that excitement does not last for long.

[23 : 09] See, for five minutes or ten minutes or three months or four years there are wonderful Christians. And the moment the trials and temptations and the troubles come to their door steps.

That is the end of the gospel for them. And I think the reason is because they did not count the cost of discipleship.

There is a cost to believing and obeying the word of God. You could get hassled, you could be called names, and of course you will not be invited to some parties that you used to be invited to.

Things change as a result of following the word of God. And so when those who represent the sheep son on the rock hear the gospel, all they hear is that Jesus loves you and God will forgive you and send you to heaven.

And they do not hear that there is a cost to that. And so this is a warning for those who think that Christianity is full of warm fuzzies and good feelings.

[24 : 17] It's light and simple. It is happy Christianity. But what Jesus is calling us to do here is to abandon such beliefs. The word of God is going to cost something in our lives.

And the third illustration of those in whom the word of God will not bear fruit is found in verse 7. And some fell among thorns and the thorns grew with it and choked it.

Now look at verse 14 for the interpretation. And as for what fell among the thorns 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.

what I call this are distracted hearts. Distraction in the lives of people. You see they receive the word of God.

It all makes sense to them but their hearts are distracted. And Jesus talks about what the destruction is about.

[25 : 33] He says the cares of this world, the riches of this life, and the pleasures of life. When we hear the word of God and we are consumed by the worries of this life, the health issues and the financial stress and the family responsibilities and our careers and getting married or not getting married, all of these things can choke the word of God in our lives.

Worries that we cannot change. We all know that worry has never changed anything. In fact, it's made it worse.

At least in my own life. Every single time that I've worried about something, it's not made it any simpler. It's made it worse. And what Jesus is saying here is that we should not ignore the worries of our lives because they can choke the word of God out of our lives.

And what the Bible invites us to do in the context of our worries is to bring those troubles and those worries into the presence of God in prayer. God is sovereign.

God is greater than every worry and care and trouble that can ever come to your doorsteps. There is nothing stronger than God himself. And these things ought not to hinder God's word in our lives.

[27 : 00] The riches of this life, the pleasures of this life, can become a problem for you. God is not against people getting money or having vacations and parties and having a good time.

The Bible is not against that. But when the pursuit of wealth, the pursuit of pleasure and hedonism stand in the way of the growth of the word of God in our lives, we are really in trouble.

And there are many instances in the Bible and in our own lives and circles of friendship, where the pursuit of riches and pleasure has hindered the growth of the word of God.

And we need to be very, very careful about all of those. Our lifestyle choices can restrict the work of God in our lives.

and it is up to us to make those decisions. God is not going to make those decisions for us. Nobody else is going to make those decisions for us. We have to decide whether the worries of this life and the riches and pleasures of this life are more important than the word of God.

[28 : 16] And I think it is a warning to the crowd as they were listening to be on God for their hearts. And it is a warning to the disciples who are listening to Jesus that they must not be unrealistic about the power of preaching.

Every single time that you and I are engaged in the preaching of the gospel, you are going to have those whose hearts are hardened. You are going to have those whose hearts are superficial.

And you are going to have those whose hearts are distracted. Whether in your family or in the church or in your workplace, we must not be unrealistic. You can preach the word of God so wonderfully well and nobody is going to hear it because their hearts are hard, unsuperficial, undistracted.

And that is why we need to keep praying for one another that our hearts are not hardened, unsuperficial, undistracted. That is the bad news, but here is the good news.

God's word will bear fruit in some people's lives. The word of God will bear fruit in people's lives. Let's look at verse eight.

[29 : 34] And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold. As he said this, he called out, he who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Verse 15. And as for that in the good soil, there are those who hear in the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience.

The good soil represents those who hear the word of God, they accept it and persevere in it, and produce fruit unto eternal life.

as they hear the word of God, they refuse to bow to the temptation of hard-heartedness, they refuse to bow to the temptation of superficiality, they refuse to bow to the temptation of destruction.

They have the same temptations that everybody else has, but by the grace of God, they are teachable, they are obedient, they allow the word of God to take control of their lives, and they submit completely to Jesus Christ.

[30 : 47] And as they submit to him, they begin to bear the fruit of repentance and faith and holiness and humility and spiritual mindedness.

The good soil has problems, they do have setbacks in their lives, they are not perfect, but they persevere in following Christ.

Let me conclude with two comments. Yesterday, when we were having family devotion in my house, I decided for us to look at this passage.

And when we finished the passage, my question to all of us was, what kind of hearer, what kind of soil are we or are you? And my eight-year-old son said to me, well, I think I am all of them.

And I thought he understood the passage. And I said, Daddy, I am all of them. Sometimes I'm like the hot soil, sometimes I'm like the rocky one, or the sunny one, or the good one.

[32 : 00] And that is true. As believers, sometimes, and in certain areas of our lives, we feel like the hot soil. we are committed Christians, but in certain areas of our lives, today is hard, tomorrow it moves to superficiality, and the next time it could be destruction, and hopefully you end up as a good soil in that area of your life.

It is possible. And I'm saying that as a word of encouragement to some of us here this morning. The hardness in your heart, the superficiality in your heart, the destruction in your heart, can be redeemed by the power of God.

And I want to give you hope as you move forward. But the point that Jesus is making here is that he wants all of us to be the kind of hearers who do what we hear.

Hearing the word of God is not enough. We must do the word that we have heard. And it comes by faith in Jesus Christ.

And so I want to ask those of you here this morning who are hard-hearted toward your spouses. You are unforgiving toward your spouses.

[33 : 21] I want to zero in on that this morning. If that is the area of the hardness of your heart, may I ask you to please forgive them.

That's the kind of gift that you can give to me as I go. If you can forgive them as a result of this sermon this morning, I'll be very, very grateful. And I beg you to do that.

And lastly, Jesus wants us to know that the condition of your heart will determine whether God's word will be fruitful in your life.

He wants us to hear the word of God and do it, but he also wants us to know that the condition of your heart will determine whether God's word will be fruitful in your life.

And so the excuses about the preaching was not good, was bad, was too long, is not helpful. Sorry about that.

[34 : 23] I needed to say that before I go. if the preaching is too long and there are some hypocrites in church, well, all of us know that there are hypocrites in church and yet we believe.

I know that there are hypocrites in church and still I believe. So the problem that you do not believe is not because there are hypocrites. It's your decision not to believe. Because those of us here, we know there are hypocrites.

And sometimes we ourselves are hypocrites and we still believe. And so hypocrites in church are no excuse for not believing the gospel. And that's what Jesus is trying to say here.

We must take responsibility for not believing the word of God and not push it off to somebody else. And so I want to encourage you this morning as we proceed in our journey to watch your hearts, to make sure that your hearts are open to God.

And I want you to pray for me that I will watch my heart and make sure that my heart is open to the word of God. Amen. Amen.