

Introductory

The Parable of the Sower and the Seed has parallels in Mark (4: 1-20) and Luke (8: 4-15). The accounts are very similar, and each includes different but not differing details. Luke's account is appointed to be read on Sexagesima Sunday in the TLH one-year lectionary. In LW, the account from Matthew is appointed to be read on Pentecost 8A.

All three of the accounts include an explanation by Jesus as to why He speaks using the literary form of parables, as well as Jesus' explanation of the parable itself. For the next three Sundays, we will be journeying through a series of parables. This Sunday, in the Sower and the Seed, we have a parable involving the same seed and different soil.

Next Sunday, Proper 11A, in the Wheat and the Tares, we have a parable involving the same soil and different seed. The text for Proper 12A is taken from Matthew 13: 44-52 and is a series of three shorter parables; the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl of Great Price, and that of the Dragnet. This may be a good time to review the basics of the Parable.

When we preach, does it not seem meet and right that we should preach not only the content that God gives us in the Bible, but we should preach the way that God talks to us in the Bible. Likewise, when we teach, we should teach not only the content that God gives us in the Bible, but we should also teach the way that God teaches us in the Bible.

Maybe begin with the etymology of the word. It will help the hearer to remember the definition. Parable comes from two words; para – beside, and bole – throw, and is a throwing of something alongside another thing. We are throwing truths about heaven, truths that may be more unfamiliar, alongside truths about things that are more familiar.

The WAM definition of parable, though dated, may still be the best definition; “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” A simile is a comparison using the words “like” or “as.” The parable is a figure of speech involving comparison. Jesus often introduces a parable by saying, “the Kingdom of Heaven is like...” indicating that a simile is coming.

A parable can be seen as an extended simile, or as an extended metaphor (a comparison not using “like” or “as”), and an allegory can be seen as an extended parable. What makes

Plato's story of the Cave an allegory, not a parable, is its length. In terms of length, from shorter to longer, in modern usage we have; simile, parable, and allegory.

Jesus uses this and other figures of speech often. Preachers would do well to follow the example of Jesus, consistent throughout the Bible. Furthermore, Jesus chooses common things that are well-known to His hearers to make these points of comparison and to use figures, and maybe we should follow His example in that regard as well.

We should always tell and explain the parable using the comparison that Jesus uses, but sometimes we should also come up with an "earthly story" more familiar to them, to help them to understand better the meaning of the parable. In his farming community, these concepts are familiar. In town, maybe not so much – but you have gardeners.

This particular parable is, in fact, very familiar, it has become part of the Church's vocabulary, and its components are well-known to many Christians. The person listening to this parable in America in the year 2020, while certainly not as familiar as the first century Palestinian listener, may be quite familiar with the concept of sower and seed.

Some modern "earthly stor(ies)" that come to mind that would get across the same "heavenly meaning" are things like; the copy machine salesman who is making cold calls, the used car salesman, or the telemarketer. Others would include: the major league baseball scout, the three-point shooter, or the pistol target shooter.

Still others would include: the gardener, the oil driller, or the coal miner. Of those three categories, which would be best and why? Okay, so maybe we can scratch salesman straightaway. The point is to compare to a subject with which your hearers will be familiar, and the more familiar the better. Just don't bring object from home.

All three synoptic accounts have the disciples asking Jesus why He speaks in parables, and all three record that response, Matthew most thoroughly, including the most lengthy quotation of the Isaiah passage. This thing very commonplace to us was a new thing to them. The parable is not completely new, but Jesus takes storytelling to another level.

The response of Jesus to the question of why He tells parables makes us uncomfortable, as the body language will have told you if you have ever spoken to the meaning of that. Those verses, which have God withholding grace from some, Barclay contends, are "among the most difficult verses in the whole gospel narrative." (Vol. II, 66)

Barclay's response, in turn, is to make those verses say something that they clearly don't say. That's one way to do it. The Bible is consistent in teaching that the Church is to faithfully proclaim the Word and leave the results to God. It's a concept that a lot of people these days have a hard time accepting, including some Christians.

Paul perhaps puts it most clearly when he uses a metaphor similar to (the same as?) this parable and says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” This parable, and our own experience and observation, teach that some will reject the Gospel outright, some will be receptive to the Gospel, and still others will believe only for a time.

Yet we find ourselves being demanded, and demanding of ourselves, that we do more than just proclaim the Gospel, more than let God sort it out. It does not begin with the demand, but rather with the more subtle, “maybe we need to do more (less) of something to attract new people.” It’s not about the message, but how we present the message.

We won’t change the message, just the way that it’s presented.” In a surprisingly short time, it is in fact the message that changes, and often dramatically, and we find ourselves saying things that we know we shouldn’t be saying and doing things that we know we shouldn’t be doing, in the hope that maybe we can make this thing grow.

Or at the very least keep it from dying. The faithful pastor will continue to be faithful, and he will continue to faithfully proclaim the Word, leaving it to God to sort it out. The faithful pastor will not, however, think that faithful proclamation is the end of it for him. If the sermon is only a re-articulation of the Absolution, then what’s the point really?

He will not use the fact that it’s God’s Word, and that God will do with it what He pleases, as an excuse to not improve himself professionally. He will strive to live an exemplary life, and he will strive to improve the way that he preaches and teaches that Word. You can tell the children to eat their broccoli, or you can make broccoli tasty.

Textual Notes

The Parable – vv. 1 – 9

1. So we find Jesus coming off of a series of conflicts, mostly with the religious leaders, most recently with His family, who once tried to have Him committed, and with whom He was disappointed. We may also consider that He is troubled by the imprisonment of John the Baptizer, the result of doctrinal conflict with Herod. John will soon be killed.

If He is troubled by the plight of John, He must have found family to be simply annoying. So “Εν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκεῖνῃ ἐξελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῆς οἰκίας ἐκάθητο παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν – in that day, leaving the house, He sat beside the sea” of Galilee. He leaves family, whose reception of Him has been sketchy at best, and assumes the posture of a teacher.

These days, when the teacher is teaching, he is usually standing. In the time of Jesus, it was the norm for the teacher to sit. Have you noticed that it can be hard to teach family,

even if you're a Pastor? The easiest teaching is when you have a group of people who don't have to be there, but who are, and who are in all likelihood are eager to learn.

2. On cue, the masses came, as they always seem to come. Matthew says, “καὶ συνήχθησαν πρὸς αὐτὸν ὄχλοι πολλοί – and many crowds gathered together to Him.” The verb form indicates that they came to Him – obviously. The preposition of motion followed by a verb in the accusative case indicates motion towards, and many crowds came to Him.

The noun “crowds” is plural. The translations say “large” crowds, but what does that mean? Large crowd + large crowd = large crowd, singular, not plural. But if we talk about “many crowds,” the correct translation, we see what that means. Most likely several groups had heard that Jesus was where He was, and all had separately made their way to Him.

Many different groups of people all converging on one spot, and that one spot is Jesus. For that reason “ὥστε αὐτὸν εἰς πλοῖον ἐμβάντα καθῆσθαι – so that He got into the boat and sat.” His being squeezed off dry land and into the boat served two practical purposes; He put some space between Him and the crowd, and the acoustics were much improved.

Often, we are told that the crowds “pressed” in on Jesus or some such thing, and we know that drill. Go to a baseball game and see how people try to get close to the star, or at a candidate rally, or when the President or Governor walks into the room. He put space between Him and the crowds, and He gained volume so that He could better be heard.

Water refracts sound, and because water is more viscous, it refracts sound better than air refracts sound. To put it another way; the voice of Jesus would naturally dissipate (spread out) in the air but would be reflected by the water. His being on the sea would have increased the volume to the hearers, and their hearing is essential to any communication.

See <http://hyperphysics.phy-astr.gsu.edu/hbase/sound/refrac.html> for more talk of fishermen and lakes and refraction. (Scroll down to the bottom.)

3. Sitting in the boat, talking to the crowds who are standing on the beach, Jesus “ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς πολλὰ ἐν παραβολαῖς – spoke many things to them in parables.” Then Matthew relates some of that, as Jesus tells the first parable, then tells them the reason why He speaks in parables, and then explaining the one He just told, then moving on with other parables.

Perhaps He was looking at a visible man on land, “Ἰδοὺ ἐξῆλθεν ὁ σπείρων τοῦ σπείρειν – Look, the planter went out to plant.” The main character in this parable is the “σπείρων – the one planting,” (a present active participle), who went out “σπείρειν – to plant,” a present active infinitive. I’m using the word “plant” because that’s the way we talk, not “sow.”

The participle indicates continuous action and ties the actor to the action, and the present infinitive “focuses upon the connection between the action and the doer of the action.”

(FGG 112). For this man planting seeds was a part of his very being, his identity as a person. If you have ever known an American farmer, then you know very well that concept.

Another concept familiar to farmers is the idea that you plant the same seed, but not all ground is the same, and in this planting the ground is different, yielding different results. These days, a combine can cost half a mil, and the on-board computer can be helpful, and as you're harvesting, you get a continuous readout how many bushel per acre right now.

About Terroir

According to <http://sciencing.com/different-kinds-land-called-8533115.html>

The different types of land are known as biomes. These are divided into four classifications: desert, forest, grassland, and tundra. Land biomes are typically defined by the type of vegetation they possess, the types of animals that inhabit them and their climate, such as rainfall and temperature. Biomes in the same classification usually share the same latitude and longitude because they share similar characteristics. Within each biome there are subcategories, although each land type falls into one of the four major classifications.

The topography here described is common in many parts of Palestine, including the area to the north of the Sea of Galilee, where the teller of this parable is currently located. Some of the ground is fertile, and some of it isn't, and some of the fertile does not run deep, and you can't always tell how deep until you throw a seed on there and see what happens.

You may need to explain this kind of land to farmers in black dirt country, where corn and soybean fields often extend to the horizon. Nine years ago, I said here that I was talking to a farm real estate appraiser at a funeral three years ago, and he told me that \$9,000 per acre is about right, and that a farm near DeWitt, IA recently sold for \$12k per acre tillable.

That Land topped off at and has held steady at \$18 – 20k for land that's among the most valuable agricultural land in the world, comparable to an acre of vineyards in the Napa Valley last time I looked. There just aren't many places in the world where rich black dirt and almost like clockwork yield 200 and some places approaching 300 bushels per acre.

On the other hand, parts of the American West are like the arid parts of Palestine. In places like Wyoming and Washington, for example, you can drive through mile after mile of sagebrush, only to come to the Green or Yakima River valleys and lush, green crops. I have seen corn fields in Wyoming. Parts of the upper and lower Midwest are like that.

Some land is tillable, but much is not because of things like poor soil, lack of rain, and in mountainous areas rocks and rocky soil can be common. In the smaller U.S. Mountain

ranges, like the Appalachian and Ozark, you will find perhaps the closest to what you would have in Palestine, including places with varying soil depth lying close together.

Today they drill seed, but the planter in the story broadcasts seed, and Jesus describes the variety of results that come from the variety of soils upon which the seed is cast. Much of the soil is not good for growing things, and for various reasons. He ends by talking about the seed that falls on “good soil” yielding a hundred, or sixty, or thirty times what is sown.

4. Some seed was thrown down “παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν – beside the road,” on land that was not plowed, so it was not able to make its way into the dirt, but lay there like it was on a dinner plate, served up on a platter to the hungry birds. Indeed, “ἐλθόντα τὰ πετεινὰ κατέφαγεν αὐτά – the birds came and devoured it.” The verb means that they consumed it all.

5 – 6. Other seed was thrown down upon “τὰ πετρώδη ὅπου – the rocky places,” where there was just enough soil for the seed to take root and start to grow. The roots did not go deep, and the plant was not able to reach deeply down into the ground to access the water and the minerals in the water needed for further growth. The sun dried it up, and it died.

7. And “ἄλλα δὲ ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ τὰς ἀκάνθας – other seed was thrown down into the thorns,” and we see all the time that it happens just like He says here, “ἀνέβησαν αἱ ἄκανθαι – the thorns rose up and choked them.” Indeed, it’s a race to sunlight, and often the weed wins the race, the good seed is denied the ability to do needed photosynthesis, and it is strangled.

8. Some of the seed makes it. The seed that was thrown down “ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν τὴν καλὴν καὶ ἐδίδου – upon the good earth yields” various amounts. It is the combination of seed – created by God – and land – also created by God, and water and Nitrogen and CO² and the like, that brings forth or yields good grain. That concept is consistent in the NT,

9. He finishes the parable with the saying, “ὁ ἔχων ὅτα ἀκουέτω – the one having ears, listen.” The verb is a present active imperative – third person singular. According to my latest exegetical toy, Phrase Concordance of the Bible, that phrase occurs six times in the NT, four during the telling of this parable, twice by Matthew, once each by Mark and Luke.

We find the remaining two occurrences in Matthew 11: 15, where He is trying to explain the meaning of John the Baptizer viz a viz Elijah – it’s complicated – and Luke 14: 35, that oxymoronic saying about salt that has “lost its saltiness.” The phrase concordance is available in hardcover used dirt cheap from Amazon.com beginning at just over a buck.

Neither GND, nor RNK, nor WP really speak to the phrase, either because they have no special insight, or maybe because the meaning is so obvious so as to not warrant mention. The saying is used by Jesus to indicate to the hearer that He knows that the hearer will have a hard time getting his head around what He has just said but try harder. It can be done.

In this case, that is exactly what appears to be going on. After He tells the story, they ask about it and Jesus explains the meaning of the parable. Moving forward, He does that once or twice, then seems to think that they should get it. But before we get to the question of the meaning of this specific parable, He first addresses the question of why parables at all.

Why Parables – vv. 10 – 17

10. The question of the disciples of Jesus, upon hearing this parable, is “τί ἐν παραβολαῖς λαλεῖς αὐτοῖς; – Why do you speak to us in parables?” We can take the question as an indication that they had not heard a lot of parables in their time. As I mentioned earlier, the parable has been around for a long time, and we even see several examples in the OT.

The parable most often cited is Nathan’s story told to David, used by Nathan to convict David of the gravity of his sin with Bathsheba. Predating Jesus by many years, is “Mashal (Hebrew: מָשָׁל)...a short [parable](#) with a moral lesson or religious allegory” (WIK). That predating takes nothing away from the Parables of Jesus, which take it to a higher level.

Tennis has been around for a long time, but modern tennis bears little resemblance to the earlier game. The same could be said about baseball, football, fill in your sport. A car is a car, but my Rav4 is a lot different car from my grandfather’s Model T, “an excellent automobile.” The Creator of these stories is the One Who sets the standard for storytelling.

11. In response to the explicit question asked by the disciples, Jesus divides people into two groups; you and them, “Ὑμῖν δέδοται γινῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἐκείνοις δὲ οὐ δέδοται – to you has been given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, to them it has not been given.” Both verbs are in the perfect tense, passive mood.

It’s the way God consistently looks at people; you are either blessed or cursed, righteous or not, wise or foolish, chosen or not, Christian or something else. Something has been given by God to Christians, and that same thing has not been given to non-Christians. What has been given? To know the “mysteries” of our religion – particularly the Sacrament – or not.

I do not like the RSV translation of “secrets.” I do not like it because it makes Christianity sound just a little bit like the lodge. I do not like it because the word is “μυστήρια - mystery,” a word used in the NT that has nothing to do with secrecy, but that has to do with comprehending Christian teachings, including especially the Sacrament of the Altar.

It does not say that such ability is withheld, but it says that it is not given, and there is a nuance in the distinction with a difference between those two things. If you give something to one child and don’t give that same thing to another child, it’s not that you are actively and deliberately withholding it. It’s just that you gave to the one but not to the other.

12. When He talks about “more” being given to the one who already has, exactly what is it that is had, and of which one is given more? Well, according to sociologists, things like wealth and fame are given in greater measure to the rich and famous – this is where moniker “Matthew Effect” comes from. We can observe that, but that’s not what’s going on here.

Gundry thinks “the saying in v. 12 rests on the economic truism that the rich increase in wealth by investing their capital while the poor sink deeper into poverty because they lack capital to invest,” referencing Proverbs 1:5 and 9:9 (256). The principle cannot be denied, and is observed, but the Proverbs Gundry quotes have to do with knowledge, not wealth.

What’s going on here is much more important than Jeff Bezos and Amazon. The Christian, hearing the parables, understands them, and so gets a better grasp on God, and on self. The non-Christian, “them,” does not have any grasp, and in fact the non-Christian hears the parables of the Kingdom, does not understand them, and gets nothing at all from them.

That having been said, we observe that often the unbelieving church leaders do, in fact, understand parables about the *judgment* of God, especially when Jesus is using parables to tell them that God’s judgment is directed against them. They just don’t understand the parables that are *Gospel* because they don’t understand the Gospel, so how can they?

For example, Jesus told the Parable of the Wicked Tenants and “when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that He was speaking about them” (Mt. 21: 45). In theological terms not understanding the Gospel, they will not understand parables of the Kingdom, but understanding the Law, they understand those parables full well.

It might be well to engage in a quick perusal of the context of Isaiah and of the words of Isaiah 6, which are not the OT text, which Jesus here quotes. Isaiah lives in Jerusalem and is speaking to Judah. From there he witnessed the conquest and subsequent extermination of Israel by Sennacherib and Assyrian. Isaiah spills much ink warning the south to repent.

Uzziah, King of Judah, whose death Isaiah references at the beginning of chapter 6, ruled mid-8th century, and died somewhere around 743, before Sennacherib. God has cleansed the lips of Isaiah and is sending him out to preach. God told Isaiah to “Go, and say to this people: Hear and hear, but do not understand...,” and that is exactly what did happen.

To a certain extent, what bothers the modern hearer about this section is that it is God who will give understanding to people, which is just one more thing that the synergist would rather do himself. And yet, the NT is consistent that spiritual life and living is given by God to man, almost like He is turning on an “understanding” switch in the individual.

But what really bothers the modern hearer is that God appears in Isaiah to be an active participant in the demise of a person to hell, cursing unbelievers so that they are unable to understand things about Him, as if God does not want them to believe in Him, as if God is a Calvinist. The good Lutheran knows full well that God “wants all men to be saved.”

The Triune God of the OT is the same Triune of the NT, and He wanted all people to be saved then, as well as He does now. But God, who created man, knows the mind and the heart of man, and He knows that sometimes that just isn't going to happen (hardness of heart?), and it is at that point that the judgment of God begins to seal his fate.

That judgment, against people or peoples who have again and again rejected Him, takes the form of God blinding their spiritual eyes and stopping their spiritual ears so that as time goes on, and they think they understand God more and more, but they actually understand less and less about God, and in the end they know nothing of Him.

Look at the religions of the world, and even at a lot of “Christian” denominations, and note how far they are from truth, and how they seem to get further and further away from it as time goes on. Paul uses the arrow metaphor in Galatians. The Pharaoh, who thought that he was divine, and whose people thought that he was divine, was not a Christian.

He did not believe the OT claims of the coming Christ, but then again there were precious few in those days, even among the Hebrews, who believed those things. As the cycle of plagues unfolds, we find that alternately, according to Moses, “the Pharaoh hardened his heart,” and “God hardened the heart of the Pharaoh.” Well, which is it?

Clearly, it is both, and one time I went through the account and found that on an equal number of occasions “God hardened” and “Pharaoh hardened.” Fast forward, and we come to the three great mass murderers of the Twentieth Century. In order of notoriety, from lesser to greater, they are; Mao Tse Tung, Joseph Stalin, and Adolph Hitler.

Which of these men was, say in the year 1944, a good candidate for conversion to Christianity? Hitler was raised Roman Catholic, and Stalin had been to Orthodox Seminary, but clearly they rejected Christianity and by their acts we can say were equally far gone from it as was Mao, who was not – as far as I know - exposed to Christianity.

It can be said of all three of these men that as time went on, and they gained power, their understanding about God became more and more warped, which may be seen to be God's judgment on them. Certainly not even Stalin, the former seminarian, would have been able to understand the meaning of this or any other Gospel parable.

Examples can also be found in our contemporaries. Brad Pitt, who was raised Christian and who says that he has found Christianity wanting, and who has stated that life started to make sense when he stopped believing in an afterlife, probably is not going to come to Jesus, nor is the woman with whom he is currently shacking up, and their poor children.

The same could be said for just about any Rocker and most movie stars, and if you listen to what they say about God, they are generally far away from the truth, and get farther away all the time; God's judgment on them. But you don't have to be rich or famous to be hardened. I have known personally several average Joes of whom I would say the same.

This verse is about the person or the group of people who reject God and Jesus and the teachings of the Christian religion. It's about their decreasing understanding about the things of God as they reject Him, they are those who reject God, and He pulls away from them, and as He pulls away from them, their understanding decreases even more.

In a way, it's like the teacher/student or the parent/child relationship. I can be a teacher if you want to learn, and I can be a father if you want to be parented, but I can't force you to learn or to listen. As time goes on, I will give you less and less teaching, less and less parenting, you will be the worse for it, and your mind will become hardened to learning.

16. Jesus brings it back to the disciples, calling their eyes and ears “μακάριοι – blessed” because “the see” and “they hear,” both present active indicative forms. With their eyes, they see miracles, and they believe them to be miracles. With their ears, they hear the Word of God, and they believe it to be that. That opening and blessing is God's doing.

17. He then moves to this wonderful, factual, descriptive statement about what they have seen and heard in and from Him, things that “πολλοὶ προφῆται καὶ δίκαιοι ἐπεθύμησαν ἰδεῖν ἃ βλέπετε καὶ οὐκ εἶδαν – many prophets and righteous passionately desired to see and to hear.” The verb occurs sixteen times in the NT, and it means great desire.

The other occurrence in Matthew is in the Sermon on the Mount (5:28), and it's used to describe the “lusting” of a man for a woman. Luke (16:21) uses it to describe the hunger of the Prodigal. Twice in Romans (7:7, 13:9), Paul uses it when talking about coveting. In his first letter (1:12), Peter speaks of things he has seen, things angels “desire” to see.

The truth is that these few are privileged to behold with their very eyes and hear with their very ears, the long-awaited and short period when God walked the earth. We likewise are privileged to see and hear that same Jesus on Sunday mornings during Divine Service, an opportunity many people still never have, even with the Internet.

The Parable Explained – vv. 18 - 23

18. Using the plural, He says that “Ὑμεῖς οὖν ἀκούσατε τὴν παραβολὴν τοῦ σπειράντος – you, therefore, understand the parable of the having planted.” The verb is often translated “hear” or “listen to,” and here it does have connotations of understanding, hence the translation. The imperative invites the hearer to comprehend the meaning of the story.

19. Speaking first to the seed sown along the path, that person hears “τὸν λόγον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ μὴ συνιέντος – the word of the Kingdom but does not get it.” The verb is different from the one in the previous verse, and it means to understand, but it has connotations of putting things together in a logical manner and so making sense of it all.

This is the person who knows all about Christianity, and who maybe knows quite a bit about it, but he just can’t ever get his head around its basic tenets and their meanings. When you try to explain things to him, he just doesn’t understand, and maybe he can’t get around things like the person of Christ and paradox, but then maybe he doesn’t really want to.

The Faith never really has a chance with this seed, and he is easy prey for Satan, who “ἄρπάζει – snatches away” what had been planted in the heart of the pagan. The verb is used almost exclusively of Satan in the NT, and we note again the goal and purpose of Satan, and eternity is an either/or; either you are Christian or not, ending in heaven or hell.

20 – 21. The rocky soil is one who “εὐθὺς μετὰ χαρᾶς λαμβάνων αὐτόν – immediately with joy receives it” – the Word. It is surface, and “οὐκ ἔχει δὲ ῥίζαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ – does not have root in himself.” The root of a plant is necessary; it delivers things like water and various nutrients from the soil to the plant. Generally, the more and deeper the root the better.

This shallow-rooted person moves from joy to something else, “ἀλλὰ πρόσκαιρός ἐστιν, γενομένης δὲ θλίψεως ἢ διωγμοῦ διὰ τὸν λόγον εὐθὺς σκανδαλίζεται – but he is seasonal, tribulation comes or persecution on account of the Word, immediately he ceases to believe.” The noun “πρόσκαιρός - seasonal” is often translated “temporary,” which is okay.

Tribulation is part and parcel of the Christian life, and persecution by others is more deliberate, and both of them can strip the new Christian of that initial joy. Tribulation or persecution can be like death from a thousand cuts, or perhaps it happens with one mortal blow. All people have tribulation, and many are persecuted and for many different reasons.

Here the hardship comes because of “the Word,” being faithful to it, sticking to it, efforting obedience to it, in spite of the hardships that might often bring. When that happens, this person abandons the Faith as quickly as he had received it. The verb “σκανδαλίζω” is in the passive mode; it isn’t an active rejection of the Faith, but more like abandoning it.

You may know people like this. I have. They have not been exposed to our religion, and when they are, they embrace it enthusiastically, coming to church every Sunday, inviting others to come with them, and the like. Then they find out that our religion might involve some hardship, and sometimes it doesn’t take much, and persecution is never pleasant.

22. As for the seed thrown down among the thorns, he is choked out by “ἡ μέριμνα τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ ἡ ἀπάτη τοῦ πλούτου – the cares of this age and the deceit of abundance.” The

word there does not mean just riches or money, but “abundance,” left over after you have been sustained; the savings account, retirement fund, stock portfolio, can all be distracting.

One can have those things, and many Christians do, and we like that, but Satan can use those things to choke out the Christian plant. It starts with skipping church to work on Sunday morning, or maybe with a deal that’s a little bit shady, or a nice run in the stock market, and it may end up with the former Christian trusting assets instead of God.

23. When seed is thrown on good soil, a plant grows and flourishes and yields many more seeds. In Ancient and Medieval times, you expected to get two seeds from one plant in 1000, but that yield doubled in the High Middle Ages to four seeds from one plant. An ear of corn these days has about 600 – 800 kernels, and Christianity produces Christians.

The way Christianity produces Christians is through Word and Sacrament. The same Word is proclaimed, and when people hear it, they believe and are baptized, or not. Some believe for a time, and then they don’t. As for the Church, it is our task to continue to proclaim the Word and baptize converts and leave the rest in God’s very capable hands.

The explanation and application here is straightforward. The exact same Word of God goes out, but with different results depending upon what kind of person or people it reaches. Since for most of human history religion has been an affair of the state, the application of this parable has been to entire groups of people, and conversion was not an individual thing.

The Middle East, Germanic, Gallic, and other western European groups of people were good soil early on, and when the Word went out one by one to each of these groups, they fell like dominos into the bosom of Mother Church. The same can be said for the various groups of peoples populating Northern Africa and Asia Minor, until the violent invasions.

Not so much other groups. Thomas is said to have made it to India and maybe even to China, and to have been martyred probably in India. Christianity did not catch on there, and never has. To be sure, the last two centuries have witnessed an increased success of Christianity in those two places, but Christians are very much a minority in both of them.

Nor did the religion of Jesus the Christ ever really catch on in His own land. After bolting quickly out of the gate, quickly after that came rejection, and rejection more than acceptance has been the norm to this day for the People of Jesus. If you have ever talked to Jesus’ people, then you know how absolutely disinterested they can be in Him.

Speaking like that of groups of people, there is no explanation here as to what makes some land better than other. Why was the ground so fertile among some and among others not so much? What changes to make a land more or less fertile? I don’t know, but that is not the point of the parable, nor does it seek to explain the why, noting descriptively that it just is.

Law/Gospel

Go Out/Gone Out – If the Great Commission has been the proof text for the LCMS for the last fifty years, then The Sower has been our parable of choice. The Law is that you have to go out and sow the Word as you have opportunity. The Gospel is that the Word has been sown, and that it has found reception in your heart, and you are a Christian. Sometimes it's well to simply bask in the warm sunshine of the knowledge that God has made you a Christian.

The preacher will be inclined to place a jab of the Law at the end, saying something like, “now that the seed has been sown in you and you have life, you should go out and sow seed so that others too can have life.” Doesn't Walther's Law and Gospel, and any other good Lutheran preaching book, tell us to leave them with the Gospel? Didn't you already say that when you preached the Law?

Don't Get It/Get It – The natural man gets it in the sense that he is religious and knows about God and the commandments and the like. However, the natural man does not get it when it comes to knowing how to get to heaven. His understanding is that he must somehow please or appease God. The Christian gets it because God has given it, the knowledge of Jesus and the way of salvation, to him. Because he gets that, he gets this and other parables about the Kingdom of Heaven (God), and getting it he understands God better and more deeply. He also understands what he doesn't understand, or as Rummy once famously put it, “We don't know what we don't know” (paraphrase).

“There are known ‘knowns.’ There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we do not know we don't know.” Donald Rumsfeld, Wikiquote.

Sermon Titles

Same Seed, Different Soil (Next Week – Same Soil, Different Seed)

About Terroir

Different Biomes

Not All Soil is The Same

Hymns

On What Has Now Been Sown – LSB 921

Spread the Reign of God the Lord – LSB 830

Almighty God, Your Word is Cast – LSB 577

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, Iowa

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