Matthew 13:18ff So listen carefully to the parable of the sower.

 The other day Raetta and I were talking, actually about numerous things. One of the bents of our conversation turned to our media feeds and how so often, people posted quasi-religious, I guess that is being nice, they post clearly false and superstitious things all in the name of faith. At that point my wife made a rather startling, and I must confess, very true statement. She said, “It’s sad. There are so many people out there whose faith is only that they believe they are religious.” Since she said it, that statement has been on my mind.

 “There are so many people out there whose faith is only that they believe they are religious.”

 Let me give you some examples. Not long ago across my feed came this statement: “*Christianity is about helping others and controlling yourself. When it becomes about controlling others and helping yourself, it ain’t Christianity.”* That is such an interesting statement. It is true, if the religion you follow is about controlling others and helping yourself, that is not Christianity! Dear people, just because the history of the world is filled with churches and people who have practiced false faith, twisted God’s Word and used God’s Word as the excuse for power, money and politics, it is still not Christianity, still not the faith Jesus himself taught even though they invoke the name of Jesus. But the fact that there are false, godless churches out there still doesn’t make the first part of this statement true. The first part said, “Christianity is about helping others and controlling yourself.” Yes, to a small extent you could argue that one of the fruits of faith is to help others and it is true that one of the other small fruits of faith is to control yourself, but that is not the foundation of Christianity. Christianity is about Jesus who suffered and died on the cross for your sins, died, was buried and rose again so that you would know you have a Savior who offers you the gift of eternal life and salvation. Don’t confuse the fruits of faith with the tree and its roots. Not a single Creed of the church says, “I believe…in helping others and making sure I control myself!” Rather they say “I believe…in the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” It is clear anyone who believes what that statement said is really only a person whose faith is that they believe they are believers.”

 Or again, think of all the things where people post about all the prayers they want and need because someone is faced with a serious problem in life. Do we really think we are going to force God to change the course of what His will has planned? We are warned in Scripture that our many words do nothing. The Lord’s Prayer does not say, “Thy kingdom come, get my will done.” Every prayer of ours needs to be simply: “Thy will be done.” Lord, carry out your good will and purpose in my life, for I trust and know that you only have my eternal life and salvation in your heart. Lord, use me to demonstrate the peace and hope I have in your gracious will.” Stop treating prayer like some sort of voodoo chant ritual that of itself has power. That’s not faith, that’s superstition. Go back and review what your Catechism says of prayer and especially what it means to pray: “Thy will be done.” Confusing superstition and faith is never a good thing.

 One more example. One of the popular hosts on a popular channel, a part of a morning show, is always willing to proclaim her faith and gush about being a Christian. But I can’t tell you how many times, as she is confessing her faith, she actually undermines and makes irrelevant the work of Jesus. In truth, she is more a person who faith is that she believes she is religious, but if all she says is true, then I would have to conclude she is not a Christian! If on one Sunday I tell you that Jesus died for your sins and is your Savior and then for the next 10 Sundays spend all my time telling you how you are to serve and in that service tell you how you can feel empowered and righteous, how is that any different than the message of the Sadducees and Pharisees of Jesus day? Those people Jesus called hypocrites and white washed tombs? Being a Christian is something very specific and pointed and it is about Jesus and his redemption not you and your feelings!

 Yes, how true it is that the faith of many people is that they believe they are religious and yet really don’t follow and truly believe in Jesus. Our text today, is exactly that lesson, only not from me, it is from Jesus. Our theme will be: **WHAT KIND OF SEED AM I?**

 I think all of us have heard this parable of Jesus numerous times but sadly, we tend to think about the parable without thinking about the fact that in this particular case, Jesus tells us specifically what He meant when he taught that parable. Most people ignore Jesus’ explanations because they don’t like what he said. You do realize, Jesus reveals that clearly three-quarters of the seed sown is not going to yield fruit. In other words, only one quarter of the seed sown will actually produce fruit to the glory of God. You also realize those words agree with what Jesus has already taught in Matthew 7:113-14: **“Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it. How narrow is the gate, and how difficult is the way that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”** Let’s look at what Jesus said about the seed that the birds ate up. He says, **“When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed along the path.”**

 So that you might fully understand what Jesus is saying, let me expand on his thoughts. The people described here are those who are “hardened” in heart. In other places of Scripture they are called the spiritually blind and deaf. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day fit this bill. Jesus said of them, **“They hear but they don’t hear, they see but they don’t see.”** They saw the miracles of Jesus and heard his authoritative way of speaking. They even had the testimony of God’s Holy Word, the Old Testament to measure and weigh Jesus by, but they just didn’t care. They already had their minds made up. They rejected the wonder, the marvel and the truth of God’s grace and love. They were already in the back pocket of Satan. But Satan understands the power of God’s Word, especially the life changing power of the Gospel of Jesus and so Satan quickly and thoroughly snatches up any seed around his people to make sure they remain his. To this very day, these same type of people still exalt man over God, laugh and scorn at the idea of Christ and salvation and work hard to come up with reasons to reject the truth of God!

 Make no mistake. The first seed are those who just reject the message and wonder of Jesus. In many cases they don’t even know what the message of Jesus is (remember the birds or Satan snatches it away), and they reject it. They would rather believe in anything else: aliens, evolution, magic, Spiritism, astrology, the force, the power of rituals and on and on. The list is really quite extensive. This is the unbelieving and sinful world who gladly maintain God as their enemy!

 Jesus describes the next type of seed. **“Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.”** Jesus explains: **“What was sown on the rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, he quickly falls away.”**

 Here we have the “wishy-washy” Christian. We have a tendency to think this type of seed isn’t very prominent anymore but that’s only because we are not paying attention. Fact is, there are a whole bunch of churches out there that just love to be wishy-washy. They have the best of intentions. They received the word. They rejoiced in the Word. The trouble is that there comes a time when they have to stand by that Word, defend that Word, or simply cling to the Word! They don’t have the strength. Part of the reason they don’t have the strength is that they have maintained at best a very shallow type of Christianity. God is love, they believe, and they would be right in that. But they don’t grasp that God is also just, righteous, holy, all powerful, all knowing and the final say in everything. They are churches who really follow the world. Whatever the world says is okay with them. They change their teachings to match the world not the Word. In truth, I think they are really ashamed of Jesus and his Word. Yep, these are the liberal, progressive, deny Jesus churches of today.

Sadly, they may also be the type who got confirmed some 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago and haven’t bothered to review the simple truths of the Catechism based on God’s Word ever! So today, half of what they think about God is pretty shallow and maybe even wrong! They don’t realize how far they have drifted from the truth and wonder of Jesus. It is into this category that I would place those who faith is that they believe they are religious.

 Like I said, you don’t see this type of seed often because there are enough “Christian” churches out there to fit any situation you want. Let’s say you want to be a Christian but you don’t what to believe in hell or justice or sin or other things found in the Bible. There’s a church for you. Want to be a Christian without believing in Jesus: that He is God, that He died for sin, and that he rose from the dead? There’s a church for you! Maybe you just want a church that will let you pick and choose what you want to believe! It is out there. Problem is these churches are just pretending to be Christian. The truth is they fell away long ago. Seriously, make sure your church is teaching and practicing what God’s Word says! That’s your job and if you fail at it and find that at your judgment God damns you, you have no one to blame but yourself! Because one of the great lessons of this parable is the importance, the absolute importance of God’s Word!

 The next seed is this: **“Other seed fell among the thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.”** Jesus describes this seed with the words: **“What was sown among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.”**

 Today, the seed among the thorns is everywhere! These are the people who have every excuse for not following Jesus. “It’s not my job…It’s the Pastor…It’s too hot…It’s too cold…But I love him or her…The service times are not convenient…Weekends are the time I have with family!” (Well, what about the bond that is built when you attend church with your family!!) I think I have heard them all. They are horrible reasons for rejecting the wonder of God, or as our parable says, “becoming unfruitful.” I think that phrase deserves a deeper look.

 That phrase is so important to grasp. It doesn’t say, like before that the plant withered and died, it says the plant is just “unfruitful.” In other words, this is saying that you haven’t made a conscious decision to reject God and Jesus but your faith is so choked and damaged that you don’t see you are not being fruitful or faithful to Jesus. Isn’t it true that Jesus tells us: **“By their fruit you will know them!”** Well, what does “no fruit” say?

 If you are not sure, then you need to read the Parable of the fig tree or contemplate what happened to the fig tree Jesus looked for fruit on and didn’t find any. Or the fact that John the Baptist taught point blank: **“The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”** Why do we think we can be unfruitful, that is trees that don’t bear fruit as God intends and still call ourselves Christian?

 For the discerning mind you will notice that the only difference between this seed and the previous seed is only a fine line. The previous seed fell because it doesn’t have the strength to endure in the Word. This seed dies (yes it does, after all it is “choked!”) because it doesn’t have the strength to resist the world. They are so close. In one you “give up the Word to follow the world.” In the other, “you follow the world and give up the word.” Both are not what we want.

 By the way, just once, when people post memories of the past on the internet, I would like to see someone post something about, “here is a great sermon I heard,” or “a great faith lesson I learned.” Nope, usually it is sport moments, glories of the past on this or that, but usually nothing about the Lord.

 Finally there is the last type of seed. **“Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”** The explanation of Jesus: **“But what is sown on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”**

 I think you recognize that Jesus was here speaking of those who are truly Christians. They treasure the Word. They exalt in the wonders of Jesus and his salvation. Their lives are lives of service and glory to God, not perfect and holy lives but lives still to the service and glory of God. They are because of Jesus. They do because of Jesus. When they see their sins they are appalled and they repent. They give thanks for the forgiveness of Jesus, for the new heart and mind that is theirs because Jesus has changed them and strengthened them. The fruit they bear is simply the result of the faith that they know is from God and from the abundant grace of God the Holy Spirit has granted them. They understand the power, the wonder, the salvation and life that Jesus has given and it is to Him that they raise praise to. They are those to whom the cross of Jesus is everything. And though they bear fruit, they always know that they bear fruit because Jesus made them a fruit tree and Jesus causes them to bear fruit.

 Now let me ask you, “What kind of seed are you?” I don’t think you are the first type because if you were, I don’t think you would be here listening and trying to grasp God’s wonders in Jesus. What about the next types…are you one of them? Are you the seed that gives up the Word to follow and be a part of the world? Are you the seed that follows the world and doesn’t see how that is choking the word out of you? I hope not! I hope you are the last type of seed. The Christian who no matter what the cost, no matter what the struggle, no matter what the persecuting world throws at you, puts and keeps God and His Son Jesus first in your life. God help your crop! Amen.