Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (9) Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.

It’s been a while since we had an opportunity to contemplate a parable of the Lord. Parables are earthly stories with heavenly meanings. What has always fascinated me is the reason that Jesus used parables. Let me share with you the reason that Jesus gave for using parables while teaching the crowds before him. He actually speaks these words in Matthew 13, verses 10-15 and if you notice those are the verses that are basically missing from our text for today. Those verses say:

**“The disciples came and said to him, ‘Why do you speak to them in parables?’ He answered them, ‘To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but it has not been given to them. For whoever has will be given even more, and he will have an abundance. But whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why we speak to them in parables, because even though they see, they do not see; and even though they hear, they do not hear or understand. In them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled which says, “You will hear clearly, but you will never understand. You will see clearly, but you will never perceive. Because this people’s heart has grown callous, their ears are hard of hearing. They have closed their eyes. Otherwise they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, turn, and I would heal them.’”**

Seriously, just let those words sink in. Here is Jesus telling us that he speaks in parables because of the callousness, the hardness, the spiritual blindness of people. He speaks parables as a matter of judgment upon them. In other words, they won’t get it, they won’t see it, won’t understand it and for the most part they don’t care either. Believers will have the wonders and awe of Jesus and unbelievers will have nothing. In this case, please remember we are speaking of spiritual and heavenly things. Life, with the grace of Jesus, is an absolute wonder, whether things are going great or things are filled with struggle and hardship. The Christian gets that. But life without Jesus just has no point or purpose, no foundation or hope. For the unbeliever you live, you die and that’s it. If you get some joy or gusto, or got to be rich or some other foolish measure, it was okay, but in the end you live and die!

So here is this parable of Jesus and it is absolutely wonderful. It is a parable that tells us about faith, about the impact of personal faith. The best thing about this parable is that Jesus is going to share with us exactly what He wants us to know. Let’s jump in and see what we can learn under the theme: **A PARABLE OF FAITH.**

Now I think the premise of the parable is pretty straight forward. Jesus uses an illustration that pretty well anyone can grasp and understand. There is a sower, a farmer, an old, old time farmer and that farmer is sowing seed in his field. In the days of Jesus that meant you had a bag of seed on your hip and you walked your field throwing seed as evenly as you could. That’s what sowing means. It is a picture of the work of a farmer but it is also the picture of the work of Jesus.

Although we are not told specifically in our text, we can surmise that the sower in this parable is Jesus or we might even consider that the sower is one of the many field workers that Jesus uses to get his work done, people like Pastors and teachers in his church or maybe it is even a picture of you and your calling as a child of God or as a parent with responsibilities for the souls of your children. I can tell you this, since it is Jesus sowing the seed, it is the best seed in the world. It is weed free and vigorous seed, carefully selected for the best crop that could be. I also want you to know that this seed represents the wonder and truth of God’s Word. Jesus would never sow bad seed but only seed that is the truth and complete wisdom of God.

If you would, just a little bit of an aside here. What happens when bad seed is used? If you were the farmer and your very life depended on this seed (which it does) don’t you want the purest and best seed there is? Would you settle for seed that was only 90% pure, 80%, 50% pure? Would you even consider it seed if it wasn’t pure? I realize this is a whole different parable to think this way, but it is still a part of the battle of faith and I want you to think about it. Jesus only sows the best and purest seed, yet in truth there are many churches out there that sow pretty diluted seed. So if the best seed the true sower sows has difficulties in this world of ours what happens when it is bad seed to begin? Just a quick thought.

Okay, let’s break this parable down. **“As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it.”** Jesus explains: **“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the Evil One comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the seed that was sown along the path.”** I am going to tell you that the farmer did everything he could to prepare the soil for that seed. But we live in a sinful world and there are enemies of God, enemies of the truth and wonder of Jesus. In this case, the enemy, the Devil himself, no doubt also using his workers: the world and the sinful flesh, is going to work against Jesus and his seed. Before that seed can even get a chance to sprout and grow, he snatches that seed away.

Shall I tell you how Satan works in today’s world to do that? He surrounds you with ideas that all religions are the same, all religions teach you about god but just from a different perspective. He leads you to think that every so-called holy book of religion (and there are many of them) is just as genuine and important as the Bible. And if you insist on the Bible, he will get you to think of the Bible as man’s word, a book of man’s work that evolved over the centuries by pious people who just wanted to help the world. But God didn’t really talk to those people and those people didn’t have science and all the wonder we have now, so they got so much wrong. Okay, use your Bible, but at least be selective and be sure to throw the bad stuff out. The bad stuff, according to the world, is anything that you don’t agree with or that you don’t like. Throw it out, God loves you and doesn’t care! And before you know it the seed God planted in your heart is gone! There is so much more that could be said here, but I think you get the idea. Satan will do anything, use anyone, and use whatever to get that Word of God away from your heart.

**“Other seed fell on the rocky ground, where it did not have much soil. Immediately the seed sprang up, because the soil was not deep. But when the sun rose, the seed was scorched. Because it had no root, it withered away.”** Jesus explains: **“The seed that was sown on rocky ground is the person who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he is not deeply rooted and does not endure. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away.”**

The soil is our hearts. What an alarm to hear of shallow hearts! It is clear, there is a heart problem among us. Being a Christian calls for action, movement, striving ahead, or maybe I should just call it being involved, even simpler yet, following Jesus. Christianity is not a stagnant thing and yet so many among us do nothing to correct the shallowness of our hearts. And when the world throws its heat at us, when life moves on as it does and we don’t take our faith with it there are going to be problems. Is this you? At first, the wonder of Jesus, hearing how God so loved you and rose from the dead for your sins, why that was inspiring, motivating, you felt that wonderful message change your heart. And then you found out you were supposed to get up and go to church or at least keep that wonder of Jesus in your heart through the Word. But there was the new boy or girl friend who spurned the faith. Or there is work and kids. There are the buddies who want to go out, or did you catch how life just seemed to get really busy and you just had no time for Jesus! Is this you? You cut your seed off from the living water of Jesus and you failed to nurture that seed with the bread of life in Jesus, the sustenance of God’s Word and your seed died. And when your fellow Christians come to help and encourage you, you get angry with them and accuse them of not understanding how hard life can be! Yet they face the same trials you do, maybe even more! How did Jesus put it, **“Even though they see, they do not see; and even though they hear, they do not hear or understand.”** So often that’s us! And we have the gall to say, “Oh I believe, I just don’t believe in church…” which in itself is a statement of unbelief! Shallow, shallow hearts.

**“Other seed fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and choked it.”** Jesus explains: **“The seed that was sown among the thorns is the one who hears the word, but the worry of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it produces no fruit.”** Did you notice that in this case the thorns choke the Word! The thorns grow and survive in the soil but choke the Word. Remember our hearts are the soil. The Word is the precious truth of God. Our hearts end up devoid of the word and full of thorns. Here is the world, full blown, attacking your faith.

Ever wonder why you become so unhappy? Thorns in the heart. They are scratchy and pokey, they will scar and impale. Your heart is troubled. You think, “Why can’t I be happy? Why can’t I get ahead (and we ask this question being a part of the richest nation in the world. In any other country our “poverty stricken” would be kings and queens of luxury. Yet we are unhappy!) I have a right to be happy.” But we don’t know where to find happiness or joy, contentment or self-esteem. We don’t grasp these are gifts God can give us. We think it is in money, cars, sexuality, drugs, or the perfect spouse…this list is pretty long. The deceitfulness of the world is vast and deadly. All too often we don’t even grasp how the world and its allurements work on us.

In our homes we make decisions based on what is expedient rather than what is best. In our lives all too often it is what suits our needs at the moment rather than the suit of armor from God we should be wearing. We buy the cabin never giving a thought to how it will keep us from church ‘cause that’s where we are on weekends. And the financial drain, well, God will just have to get by with less. Again, the way the world can attack and allure us, pull us away from God, choke the very wonder of the Word from us. And instead of being on our guard and paying attention to what Jesus says…well, that’s for the other guy. We think, “I sure wish so and so was here to hear this!” But did you hear? Do you take to heart?

Finally, **“But some seed fell on good ground and produced grain: some one hundred times, some sixty, and some thirty times more than was sown.”** Jesus explains: **“But the seed that was sown on the good ground is the one that continues to hear and understand the word. Indeed he continues to produce fruit; some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times more than was sown.”**

The good ground. The heart touched by God’s Holy Spirit and made new in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. This heart has heard the grace of Jesus. It isn’t about what we do, it is about what Jesus has done. He lived the perfect life we could not. He went to the cross to pay for our sins. It was no accident that Jesus was crucified and died when and how he did. It was the plan of God for our very souls. And then Jesus rose from the dead to proclaim the victory won and eternal life and salvation given for all who would believe. We are saved by God’s grace in Jesus! That’s the heart of faith. But did you see how Jesus tells us the seed produced and he explains: **“The seed that was sown on the good ground is the one that continues to hear and understand the word. Indeed he continues to produce fruit.”**

Dear people, this is not required for salvation, but it is what happens when salvation is a part of your life. You are created new, given a new heart and mind in Christ Jesus. Good works, fruits of faith, here, the harvest of seed, just pour from us in every way. It doesn’t matter how much is produced, a hundred, sixty or thirty, God brings about in the heart of his children exactly the harvest he desires. You heard that in our Old Testament lesson: **“It will accomplish whatever I please, and it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it.”** No, works are not required, but they happen in joyful abundance because our hearts are truly filled with Jesus.

Fact, I am unworthy. In truth, at one time or another I was each and every one of these types of seed that Jesus exposes. In truth, though a Christian pastor for some 38 years, I still wrestle with being the different types of seeds that are found in this parable. And when I am blessed to see it, to hear and understand, I thank God for Jesus and the forgiveness he grants. That he leads me to the joy of salvation found in Jesus. Then he fills my heart with wonder and awe that I, the lost and condemned sinner, have been proclaimed his child and an heir of eternal life. God causes my seed to sprout and a harvest to be found, to the glory and wonder of his holy name!

Do you see now how this parable should be applied? It is not a matter of I am this seed or that seed! It is a matter of understanding that I am all of these seeds. Satan and his attacks are too numerous, too clever and they are all around. Always. So if I am not careful and diligent in Christ, in his Word, getting that living water, and the nourishing bread of life found in Jesus, my seed, my faith will die. Lord, continue to be my help and guide. Continue to help me hear and see and understand that in the end, because of You and your work, I end up being, for You, the seed sown on good ground. Oh Lord, help me to see, to hear, to understand your grace in Jesus. Amen.