Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (Our text is the same as our gospel reading, the Parable of the Sower)

 How many times in your life would you guess that you have heard this parable? For those of you who are older you have heard it many times, perhaps once a year or more. For some of you, you may only be hearing this parable for the tenth or fifteenth time. Some of you, this may actually be the first time you have heard this parable. How many times have you heard this parable?

 Yet I have to confess that I am being a bit misleading this morning. Not in the sense that I purposely have lied to you but in the sense that you probably don’t really get the real gist of my question. I don’t actually want to know how many times you have heard this parable, ear wise, I am really pushing to see who has HEARD this parable…heard it in the sense of Jesus’ words, **“He who has ears, let him hear.”**

 It is one thing to hear this parable with your ears, that is to hear this parable in the normal audio way in which things are heard by us humans. It is quite another thing to hear this parable in the way Jesus wants it heard. Jesus wants us to hear the message with our hearts, to grasp its meaning, to learn from its lessons, to grow in our knowledge of the Christian faith. Because sometimes when we ask, “Did you hear me?” we are not trying to check and see if your ears are working, we are really asking if you understand and comprehend what is being said.

 To miss the message of this parable is to put ourselves in the very same sandals as the people of Jesus’ day, the people to whom Jesus said, **“Though seeing they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.”** Let us strive this morning to come to grips with this parable and what it says to us so that we may grow in the knowledge of the kingdom of heaven. Our theme for today is: **WHAT KIND OF SEED ARE YOU?**

 Listen to the words of Jesus. **“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.”** Stop there. Just what was Jesus trying to say as he spoke of seed that fell along the path and was eaten by birds? I can tell you that if people were just going to guess as to what was being said, the answers would be numerous and mostly wild ideas. Thankfully, we don’t have to guess what Jesus means because later on in this text Jesus himself tells us the point. 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. 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 were already those who had 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, still laugh and scorn at the idea of Christ and salvation and still work hard to come up with reasons to reject the truth of God!

 But be careful. This type of person is not only outside of the church but many today are inside the church. They are the ones who reject the Bible as God’s Word or who undermine the power and authority of God himself by believing that God just isn’t smart enough to give us His truth and revelation in the Bible. They are still the ones who exalt man over God and they do so by believing that man’s knowledge and grasp of things can surpass that of God. It’s the person who tells you they are Christian but as you look at their life it is clear they don’t care one bit for what Jesus says or did, especially the fact that Jesus says the Word is the heart of it all. No wonder Satan works so hard to keep the word away from his people!

 Jesus goes on in his parable to describe 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 to what is what. 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 rejoice 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 the type who got confirmed some 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago and haven’t bothered to review those 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!

 Like I said, you don’t see this type of seed often because there are enough “Christian” 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. What to be a Christian without believing in Jesus: that He is God, that He died for sin, that he rose from the dead, etc? There’s a church for you! Maybe you just want a church that will let you pick and choose what you want to believe! There’s a church for you. Problem is these churches are just pretending to be Christian but the truth is they fell away long ago. Seriously, make sure your church is teaching 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 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. And 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, I think 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. And isn’t it true that Jesus tells us: **“By their fruit you will know them!”** A good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree bears bad fruit…and if you understand correctly you will also grasp that a bad tree doesn’t bear any fruit…it is fruitless! What does Jesus say of this?

 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 really 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, eventually!) 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.

 Finally there is the last type of seed. **“Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundren, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”** The explanation of Jesus! **“But what is sown on good soil is the name 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 indeed ones 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 rich and 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.

 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.