

Theme: God's Word never gives up on people

Text: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this morning. Amen

We have, in today's Gospel lesson, another well-known parable—the Parable of the Sower. The Sower goes to sow seed upon his field. Some of the seed falls on the wayside, where the birds eat it. Some fall on stony places, only to be scorched by the sun. Some fall among thorns and are choked to death by the aggressive weeds. Finally, some fall on good ground and yield a crop.

It is interesting how people react after hearing news of any kind. Their reaction depends on the perspective of the person who hears this news. For some people news may be "good news" but for others "bad news". For example; if someone is elected, among others, to occupy an important position in a company, this may be wonderful news for some people, but the same news may be terrible for others.

Jesus Christ, through this parable, teaches us how people react to the Word of God. And He says that there are four reactions of them when they hear the Word of God.

1st. Some people do not believe it. 2nd. Some people believe it but then they fall due to trials. 3rd. Some people believe it but then they move away due to temptations, and 4th. Others remain in the faith despite trials and temptations.

The challenge for us today is to understand the meaning of this parable, because the lifestyle of today has changed a lot over the past two thousand years. On those days, in order to grow a plant, the seed was just thrown on the ground. Not like today. Now farmers use machines to produce the best harvest. Now, they take in consideration the kind of soil, which fertilizer to use, the weather, and a lot of other factors which will make a good impact on the ground to produces fruit.

Back then, farmers did not have the equipment and they had not discovered many things that now farmers have at their disposal to produce a good crop. So, how did they sow the seed? Well, a sower went out walking on the land, throwing the seed by hand. For sure, some seeds fell in places not very fruitful or productive. The seeds there did not sprout, or if the seeds sprout it has no enough roots or nutrients to survive.

In the Parable of the Sower; Jesus, **first**, speaks of the seed that falls "along the path." What is the characteristic of the land along the road? This area is hard. The seed stays on the dry ground and it does not grow. These seeds are fully exposed to external things that do not allow them to grow.

Jesus is not referring literally about seeds, but to the fact that in the kingdom of God we will see that there are people who do not receive the gospel message, due to the hardness of their hearts. It is sad when a person who is very near and dear to us not believe in the Word of God.

When a person closes his or her heart and does not see the need to repent and receive the message of forgiveness, life and salvation, that person usually is not convinced of his or her sin. If a person does not recognize their status toward God, he or she will not recognize the need of the gospel in their life.

Second, Jesus speaks of the seed that fell on rocky places. On these areas there is not much soil and the seed sprouts but soon it withers and dies because there is not much soil and water.

No doubt you have seen this kind of land. There is little soil on the top and there are many rocks underneath. You may see that there are trees there also, but when a storm or strong winds hit them, the trees cannot stand themselves and fell. And this happens because their roots are weak and cannot resist a strong wind.

When Jesus uses the example of the "rocky ground," He is talking about people who receive the message of the gospel. They received it "with joy," but when the time comes to face trials they soon begin to question the credibility of the gospel. Soon they begin to doubt. Then, they say, "How the gospel is 'the power of God' and these things are happening to me? This doubt eventually becomes a rejection of the gospel message.

We can think about the first believers in Christ. They were persecuted by Roman emperors such as Nero, Domitian. In the first two centuries after Christ, thousands of Christians died rather than to deny their Lord Jesus Christ. On the other hand, there were many others who did not stand firm against the threats of the Roman officials; to either renounce Jesus Christ or die.

Today there are thousands of people around the world who persevere in their faith despite threats and even death. The organization "**the voice of the martyrs**" claims that there are more people who had been persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ in the last hundred years than in the whole history of Christianity.

But there are other people who falter in their faith, not because they are threatened with death, but simply because they do not want to suffer the ridicule and criticism from others. So, in our times the subtle persecution is sometimes enough to cause a stumble in our faith in Jesus Christ.

Third, Jesus speaks of the person who has heard the Word. This person receives it, and believes it, but the distractions of the world, the cares of this world drown the faith of such person.

It is easy to fall into all these, because the truth is that we get easily worried about everyday things like food, home, health, the welfare of our children or relatives. Many times, when we face a difficulty in life we seek everywhere for a solution, or we ask, "Why me?" I could ask back, "why not you?"

It is very interesting that the word "worry" or "anxiety," comes from an Old English word that means "to strangle." When we are concerned or preoccupied it is like drowning, and we are paralyzed, unable to function properly.

Jesus teaches us not to worry because "to worry is worthless." What good does worry accomplish? What does it change? It is a useless endeavor. Jesus says in other part of Scripture, "And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" (Matt. 6:27)

Finally, the last type of soil illustrates the fruit that God's Word can bear. Jesus said, "As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty." This time, the roots of God's Word run deep. It thrives and produces a harvest. Notice though, that even the good soil is dead until God's Word takes root in it. The power comes from God and He uses His Word to distribute that power. God works in us as we read or hear the Word.

He brings us into His family as that very same Word combines with the water of Holy Baptism to join us to Christ in His crucifixion. He sustains and strengthens our faith with the Word combined with bread and wine as He offers Himself to us in His body and blood. These are the Means of Grace whereby God works the power of His Word in us.

My friends in Christ; we have talked about four different reactions from people when they hear God's Word. But, let me tell you that God wants no one to perish. God spreads His Word throughout the earth to all peoples in all times and in all places. He withholds His Word from no one just as He withholds His Son from no one.

Jesus Christ died on the cross to take away the sins of all people in all times and in all places. He rose from the dead to declare His victory to His disciples and He told them, (Act 1:8) "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." In this way, God has promised to sow the seed of His Word to the ends of the earth.

Today's Old Testament reading tells us, "¹⁰For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:10-11)

You see, as an earthly story, a parable has limits. It can only illustrate a few spiritual truths at best. So it is with the Parable of the Sower. Although there are many ways in which God's Word is like a seed, there are some things God's Word can do that seeds cannot. A seed cannot change the soil on which it falls, but God's Word can and does change the heart.

The message of the salvation that Jesus earned for us on the cross can soften the hard heart. It can break up the rocks and overcome the thorns. God does not sow His Word once and then give up. He sows His Word generously season after season. He sows His seed with a loving, reckless generosity.

We are all born hard, rocky, and thorny, but season after season, God applies His Word. God sends parents, teachers, friends, and pastors to bring His Word to

us. Eventually, the word sends its roots deep and the Holy Spirit creates the faith that trusts in the crucified and risen God-Man, Jesus Christ, for salvation.

The windows of heaven will open and that faith will receive all the gifts that God wants to pour out on us. He will give us the forgiveness, life, and salvation that last forever. Through His Word, He promises to be with us here on this earth and that one day He will take us home to be with Him forever. Amen

“My friends in Christ; that the Holy Spirit preserves you in the faith that seizes the promises of Christ, so that you may walk in confidence in the grace that you have received.” Amen