

July 12, 2020 Sermon  
Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

*That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some, thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"*

*Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; that is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."*

There is a large, concrete planter on the porch of the parsonage. When I moved in, during the month of December, it was filled with whatever was left over from maybe a year before me. There were some unidentifiable plants and lots of grassy, weedy vegetation growing there.

Now, I *may* have grown up on a farm, and I *may* have some pretty nice-looking houseplants, but I am NOT a gardener of any kind. I *don't* enjoy being on my hands and knees, digging into the dirt with my bare hands, all the while, sweating in the hot sunshine. As it turns out, I'm not very good at keeping outside plants *watered*, either.

Do you remember the show, Murphy Brown? With *each* new episode and sometimes in the *middle* of an episode, there would be a new receptionist sitting at the desk in Murphy's office. It was humorous, at least to me.

Well, that's kind of what began to happen to my planter. Once some people realized I wasn't going to keep it filled with *plants*, it became a challenge to fill it with beautiful reminders of God's handiwork, and *their* green thumbs, as well.

I've lived here for close to six years now and that planter has held geraniums, marigolds, pansies, some fake Christmas greenery, a flag (because it's hard to kill a flag), and *finally* it has some succulents planted there. The succulents are doing quite well, mainly because they can grow without an abundance of water. (Did I mention I'm not good at remembering to water things?)

Some of the ladies of the church have worked very *hard* to keep that planter looking *wonderful*. I've caught them taking out *old* soil and refilling it with *new*. I've looked out the front door after hearing noises, only to see them digging out the old, dead flowers, and planting new things; and on *one* occasion, I even found someone spraying the planter with fertilizer...seriously...a good garden flag really *doesn't* need any fertilizer, but I guess it was for the pansies.

As I have said, the succulents seem to be doing well, with the exception of a squirrel that had been using the planter as a hiding place for nuts (even the SQUIRREL knew this gal was not going to plant anything there). I went out one morning to find two of the plants on the floor of the porch, so I carefully tucked them back into the planter and then *watered* them.

But here's the deal, even though several individuals have given up on the planter, there is always someone *next* in line to *plant* something there. *No* one is going to give up on that planter. It will *eventually* produce something worthy of seeing, in spite of my poor watering capabilities.

With this last planting, a bag of cactus soil was brought in because it has different nutrients than other soil that would be used for a regular flower bed. Not that regular soil *can't* be used, but this is a good soil for growing succulents...and maybe that's what Jesus was talking about in today's lesson when he was talking about planting in good soil. (Notice Jesus mentions *nothing* about watering)

Jesus said “But for what was sown on *good* soil, this is the one who *hears* the word and *understands* it, who *indeed* bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Jesus is, of course, trying to grow disciples. And he shares, in his cryptic way, what it takes to become a *good* disciple. To become a good disciple, one has to *hear* with an open mind, and an open heart. One must be *attentive*, and most importantly, *persevere*. The ladies of the church are NOT going to give up on the planter of the parsonage porch. WE should not give up on trying to understand what it is that God in Christ is saying to us.

Nor should we give up on sharing the good news of Christ with *others*. As a pastor, there are times when I finish a sermon, and I wonder if the message got through. I wonder if people *heard* the Holy Spirit speaking to *them* as I heard the Holy Spirit when I was *writing* the sermon, but what I found is that we all hear *differently*. The theme may be the same, but soils that receive the theme are all different, so what *grows* out of that soil and what is *understood* may not be what another batch of soil is understanding and putting forth.

Circumstances in our lives cause our soils to be different. When a group gathers for worship on Sunday mornings, they have all had different experiences throughout the week. They come from different families and different walks of life. Depending on those experiences, our soil can be hard, rocky, acidic, sandy...you *name* it.

I am quite fond of hydrangeas. The blooms are huge, the plants can grow very tall, and the colors are so vibrant. What I found is that you can *change* the acid level of the soil to turn them different colors. I had a neighbor in Ohio that changed the color of his hydrangeas quite often. At first glance, I thought maybe he had dug up the old ones and replaced them with the different colored ones, so one day I asked how this magic was happening. He said, “*It’s all about the soil.*”

So, in what kind of soil have you been planted? If it’s the hard soil in the path, then maybe you’re not quite understanding what’s being said about God’s kingdom, and so you’ll go with whatever you’re hearing for the day. One person convinces you to think one way, and the next day, it’s something else, until you’re to the point of not believing much of anything.

Maybe you've been planted in the rocky soil. If that is the case, then we get all jazzed up about what we hear during a great service where everyone is stirred up into a frenzy, but then it's a huge letdown when you get home because no one is there to keep that feeling going, so when something *bad* comes your way, you let the bad over power your joy, and you feel uprooted.

Perhaps the rocky ground is where you're trying to grow, but the world of commerce and entertainment are just too strong, and storing up treasures here on earth seem much better than letting God take care of things; and you're *trying*, but it's *difficult* to grow spiritually in that kind of environment.

We would ALL love to grow in the good soil, wouldn't we? I know that most of us try super hard to plant ourselves and grow in the good soil. We WANT to hear and understand, and we WANT to be able to understand so much that we reach out and bear fruit over and over again.

We want to *see* God's kingdom grow, and so we need to stay focused on our work ahead. Pay *attention* to whether or not we are nurturing enough in God's garden of disciples. We *all* need to *fertilize* and *feed* each other with *compassion* and *prayerful* support. Rain down on one another with *kindness, love* and *understanding*. Pull up the weeds of deceit, hatred and injustice so our garden of discipleship can yield a hundredfold or more. THIS is what God wants to see. THIS is what needs to be in the concrete planters of God's kingdom! (And don't be afraid to wave your flag!)

One of my *favorite* stories to tell is about riding on the tractor with my dad when he planted in his fields. One particular spring day, I was available to ride, while he planted beans. He *loved* to leave his initials on things (our initials are the same) and when he got to a little corner of the field that was hard to plant, and almost *always* under water, he decided to plant that section in the shape of the letter "p."

Forgetting that we had planted a letter in the corner of the field, I drove past it one day on my way to the nearest big city, and there, as big as you please, was the letter "p" in soybeans. Somehow, those seeds had managed to take root and grow first. It's just as Jesus (and my Ohio neighbor) said...It's all about the soil. May your heart be the good soil, open to the seed of God's word. Amen.