

“Jesus went out to sow”

The Parable of the Sower is a familiar parable – but even if it is not familiar – most of us at least have a basic understanding of the farmer planting the seeds, the seeds growing, and then the harvest. So, you’d think the meaning of the parable would be obvious to us – but it’s not – nor was it obvious for Jesus’ disciples.

The problem isn’t that we don’t know enough about farming – or that Jesus uses complicated and technical language. No, the issue at hand – is that with this parable – we come face to face with the miraculous working of God the Holy Spirit through the preaching of His Word.

One thing is quite clear – the Sower in the parable is reckless – He’s throwing the seed everywhere. It’s not the nice, neat rows we are used to seeing out in the fields (or in our gardens). He’s casting it far and wide – seemingly without concern for where it falls.

Matthew helps us to get off on the right foot with this parable when he prefaces it by saying that “Jesus went out of the house” to preach – and then says that “a sower went out to sow.” Jesus is scattering His Word upon the great crowd that has been gathered to Him – just as He is doing here today.

Our Lord is not stingy with His Word – for just as Christ was crucified for all – so the Gospel is for all. Christ preaches the good news of forgiveness, life and salvation – because that is what God desires for all people.

In the Parable we hear about what happens to the scattered seed – and this is often where we run into difficulty in understanding the parable. We immediately think that the success, or failure, of the crop is dependent upon the condition of the soil. In other words, we want to make the success of God’s Word dependent upon the person who hears the Word.

The truth is what we confess in the Small Catechism – “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel ...”

To make the success of the crop dependent upon the one who hears it – it to hear without understanding – and the birds come and devour the seed (which is the Word of God). Hearing the Word of God is not about learning certain “facts” and “details” and then deciding whether to believe it or not. Making it dependent upon me takes God the Holy Spirit out of the picture – and God’s powerful Word is snatched away.

Thanks be to God that the Holy Spirit is never absent from His Word – so that where the Word is proclaimed – there the Holy Spirit is at work, to create and sustain faith in Jesus Christ – a faith that trusts that He alone atones for sin by His blood, and reconciles us to God.

The evil one knows that God’s Word is powerful and effective – that God works through His Word to produce a harvest of those who believe what He promises. So the evil one goes to work – doing all that he can – trying to separate God’s life-giving Word from you, who by nature, are dead soil because of their trespasses and sins.

If the preacher teaches that forgiveness, life and salvation are dependent upon you, the hearer – the Gospel is snatched away from those who hear it with their ears. If the Word is sown and you are scandalized by the simplicity of the Gospel which is so contrary to the wisdom of the world – then it is not properly understood – it is snatched away.

“As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulations or persecution arises on account of the Word, immediately he falls away.”

Again, the problem is that the hearer “has no root in himself.” When the “tribulations and persecutions arise on account of the Word” – when it is hard to be a Christian – if he looks to himself, he is in danger. In his struggle, he might say – “If I am a Christian, why do I keep on sinning?” He might convince himself that, “I need to try harder, I need to be more devout and sincere.”

Looking to himself, there is no root by which he can endure what comes His way. That is why the Holy Spirit is always pointing us to Christ – so that rooted in Him – we might not be overcome.

And then there is the seed that fell among the thorns. “The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word ...” You know what that’s like. You know how easily the things of this world become more important than God and His Word. We look to the world to solve our cares – we look to the security of material things – and God takes a back seat – and we are choked off from the only real hope that we have – Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners.

Years before the Savior was born, the Lord, through His prophet Isaiah said: “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, so 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.”

Jesus Christ is the Word of God come down from heaven – and He does not return to the Father empty, but succeeds in the thing for which the Father has sent Him. The Father has sent His Son “for you” – that you would hear and believe His promises – so that forgiveness, life, and heaven, would be yours.

That is why He commands you not to despise preaching and His Word. Do not be deceived into thinking that church and God’s Word is a big nothing. It is the Word of the Lord who desires that you would be saved – so He gives the Holy Spirit to you in Baptism – scatters His absolution upon your ears – places His Body and Blood in your mouth – that you might hear, and believe – “my sin is forgiven, for Jesus’ sake.”

Today Jesus scatters the Word of the Lord – and God the Holy Spirit brings forth the fruit of faith in your life – so that your neighbor might be blessed by your love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control – along with a whole crop of other benefits. And all this He does, by His Word.

God grant you His Holy Spirit that you might have ears to hear ... believe ... and be saved ... all for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.