

The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

August 7, 2011

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "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. 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. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear." ... "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 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 sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on 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. The one who received the seed that fell 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. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." (NIV)

If you have one, how is your garden growing this summer? It is probably like most gardens - it varies, doesn't it? After being gone for a little over two weeks one of the first things my children did when we returned, after checking on the cats, is run out to look at their garden. You might guess what they saw. Some things that had once looked good were not looking so good anymore. Other things they had planted are surrounded and being choked out by all the weeds. A few things that never really got started, still don't show any signs of life. Finally, there are some plants and vegetables that are growing stronger and bigger by the day.

And it is this simple illustration, this visual, Jesus uses to teach us a lesson today about the kingdom of God. Jesus uses a parable, literally meaning something that stands side by side with something else, a comparison, to open our eyes to important truths. As Jesus teaches through this familiar parable I pray we listen. I pray we listen carefully because the Word which we hear from our God is far better than the best miracle grow in the world. Listen to this Word for: **The Word Works A Wondrous Crop.**

If I had the difficult day Jesus did, I might have gone home and called it a day. Jesus had put in a full day of teaching and healing. He had to defend himself against the cruel accusations that He was doing the work of Beelzebub. Even His own mother and brothers frustrated Him by trying to rein Jesus in because they thought He was out of His mind. Yeah, after a day like that I might have called it quits for sure, but not Jesus.

Jesus had another lesson for the people He loved. We read: ***“That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.”*** I can’t say I have ever preached or heard a sermon from a boat, but I’ve read that this would allow Jesus to speak to this great audience. The water would work like a speaker system to carry His voice to this large crowd. Jesus wanted them all to hear what He has to say.

As Jesus goes on to tell this well-known parable of the sower, some have even said that perhaps within sight was a farmer spreading some seed. A farmer in Jesus day would have had a pouch by his side and would spread the seed by hand. It took a great deal of practice to sow evenly. But even for the best sower as the seed would be scattered it would fall onto different types of ground. Some seed falls on the path and it gets devoured immediately. It becomes bird food. Other seed falls on rocky places where the top soil is thin. It grows fast, but then the scorching sun appears, and it withers because it has no root. Then there is the seed that falls among the thorns. Eventually, the weeds are too much and end up choking the plants. Still there is the last of the seed that falls on good soil and it produces a crop, a wondrous bountiful crop. Jesus uses this picture to make a point.

So how is this sower and the seed like the kingdom of God? Thankfully, Jesus makes my job this morning a very easy one because Jesus instructs us on exactly what this parable means. Later, back in the house, Jesus says to His disciples: ***“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 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 sown along the path.”*** There are some people who hear God’s Word but never really listen to it. They do not even give the Word a chance. They scoff at it. They harden their hearts to the message. They would rather call Jesus Beelzebub and His religion foolishness.

Jesus goes on: ***“The one who received the seed that fell on 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.”*** There are people who hear the good news about Jesus and are happy to hear it. They believe and are initially filled with joy. They may be confirmed in the faith and eager to join the church. But their faith only lasts for a short time. They do not grow in their understanding of the Word. When the going gets tough this person gets going. Jesus, hearing His Word, coming to and serving in His Church, is no longer worth the sacrifice to them. They stop hearing the Word and they fall away. Similarly, ***“the one who received the seed that fell 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.”*** There are some distracted by the worries of life. The weeds end up getting the best of them. The lure of money, the endless rat chase of life, chokes out faith making such a person unfruitful.

Dear friends, don’t we see a little of each one of these wrong types of ground in us? Are there times we hear God’s Word but don’t really listen? Does the devil ever get us to harden our hearts to certain portions of God’s Word we don’t like to hear? Do we wonder if this church thing is really all worth it or wither under pressure? Who of us can say worry or greed is never part of our life? There are many things which distract us

from listening to the Word of God. There are so many times we fail to understand just how important, how vital, it is to take time for the one thing needed. The Word of God is more important for us & our faith than sunshine is for a flower or water is for a plant. The Word is even more important than food is for our bodies. Think about that for moment! Jesus once said to the devil, ***“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”*** (4) So why, with the Word so available and with opportunities so plentiful do we so often foolishly neglect God’s Word? The only answer I have is the one we confessed this morning when we acknowledged how as poor miserable sinners we have sinned against God in our thoughts, words, and actions and deserve His punishment both now and in eternity. After confessing that once more, I pray you join me then in turning our eyes toward Jesus.

Once again we will see a perfect man who never once neglected God’s Word. When I study Jesus’ life in the Bible it always amazes me when I read things like Jesus at age twelve in the temple listening to the teachers, or how Jesus is going to the synagogue as was His custom to hear the Word. If the Son of God felt He needed God’s Word and to be in church on a regular basis who in the world do I think I am to believe I need any less! Yet, Jesus listened to God’s Word perfectly for me - in my place. Jesus also died for me - in my place. Jesus died to pay for my neglect of His Word. Jesus suffered on the cross to pay for all the times we sinned by hardening our hearts against the Word. Jesus shed His blood to pay for all our foolish greed and needless worry. Jesus suffered hell for all the times we withered under pressure and felt taking time for the Word wasn’t worth the effort. And Jesus rose for me and for you and speaks to us the best words of all - forgiveness - life - grace - peace - empty grave - heaven.

That is why we want to listen to this powerful Word. Without a doubt it works a wondrous crop! ***“But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”*** We might even translate Jesus’ explanation as the person who keeps hearing or continues to hear the Word. Brothers and sisters in Christ, if you come to church every Sunday, stay for Bible study or Sunday School on a regular basis, read devotions and the Scriptures at home regularly, I can’t promise you good health, a lot of money, or an easy life without any troubles. But I will promise you will be blessed! The Word works! It never, ever, returns to God empty! The more you grow in faith, the more you know and understand God’s Word, the more you are filled by the love and forgiveness of Christ Jesus - the better you will be as a loving and faithful spouse or parent or child or friend. The more you grow in the Word, the more you will grow in service with your gifts, in service in your homes, in service in your life and others around you will be blessed. The more you grow in the Word, the better you become as a sower of the Word to tell others the good news. The Word works a wondrous crop ***“yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”***

Jesus witnessed all four different groups of people as He preached the Word. In my now ten years here at Amazing Grace I too can say I have seen the truth of this parable and have also witnessed seed that fell on the path, on the rocky places, among the thorns, and by God’s grace on the good soil. I pray we never skip by this parable because it is familiar & simple. Jesus gives us something to consider far more important than whether your garden is growing this summer. The question is: are you growing? Are you

growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ? God has given you everything you need for growth right here in this Word. So I urge and encourage with the same words that Jesus used: "***He who has ears, let him hear.***"... "***Listen.***" Yes, listen and never stop listening to the Word of God. It is my prayer that each one of you become a wondrous crop. Amen.