



“Ears to Listen, Seeds to Sow”

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday and Sunday, July 15 and 16, 2017

All Services

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 55:10-13; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

So who knows what the next big holiday event is that's coming up? Come on, Pittsburgh Steelers training camp in eleven days. Yea! Ah, I love training camp. What I love about training camp is you've been waiting since the draft in April to see who's going to come in, who's going to make the team, who's not going to make the team. What players are going to be the ones that stand out that you say: "O this is somebody that's going to make an impact on our team?" And it's exciting to see which cream rises to the top. Will there be another one like a number of years ago when six round Antonio Brown became one of the best receivers in all NFL. This is the time of wondering who's it going to be, who is going to be that great new player to emerge to help lead your team to another championship, another Super Bowl. (Holds up 7 fingers)

The people in Jesus day were wondering the same thing about him. This young prophet was doing amazing things; healing, teaching, connecting. Could he be the promised one from Holy Scripture? Indeed, could he even be the Messiah? The one to lead his people to freedom. He taught with power. His words excited the imagination of the Israelites. He used metaphors of "seed time" and "harvest," language that had been a picture throughout all of scripture of how God the Creator would act to redeem his people from their sins, how he would rescue them from exile, how he would deliver them from oppression. And now this young preacher comes and he begins talking about a new harvest. "Could he be the one, the one that we have been waiting for throughout these generations?"

It's no wonder that the crowd eagerly listening standing while he sat, that after all is the proper position for a teacher. The teacher is the one who sits and the learners/disciples stand. He teaches from a boat on the Sea of Galilee, this wonderful natural amphitheater. The hills rise up out of the Lake of Galilee and there have been people who have stood on the lakeside and been able to preach so you can imagine that hundreds and thousands of people could gather to hear this young, itinerate preacher. He uses language that excites them, "sowers" and "seeds" and "soil," but obstacles too, and the Kingdom of God come near.

Over the generations there have many interpretations of this parable of Jesus, the seed and soil. Some see it as a parable of the history of Israel, of God sending kings and prophets and priests and some being received well and some not so well. Others see this as a parable of the difficulty of establishing that kingdom of God. Still others see it as a parable of personal responsibility as seed and one's receptivity as soil to the Word of God. And still others see it as the need of us to spiritual seed sow and God's power of being able to accomplish God's purposes.

The message isn't obvious. You have to think about it, you have to ponder it. The word that's often used in religious spiritual circles is *discernment*, not just judging from right from wrong, but seeking to understand what is primary to what is secondary, what is essential to what is insignificant, seeking after God's heart and God's will the things that are in the Bible that really matter to God. Cultivating discernment helps you and I to grow spiritually, because after all people rush really too quickly to judgment. Unfounded gossip, presumed guilt, quick condemnation, we're quick to have something to say. But discernment slows down that process and allows God to enter into our decision making. That's why Jesus says, "*Let anyone with ears listen.*"

Martin Luther on his lecture on Galatians tells us that listeners of God's word need to become active listeners to the needs and the hurts of others, and also active servants to neighbor and to God. And whenever our pastors are engaged in counseling, it's important for us to do what's called *active listening*, focused listening on the need of the other who is before us. Indeed, all of us in our relationships should be engaged in active listening because we truly care about those with who we are in relationship.

Discernment leads to commitment. In his book *the One Minute Manager*, Ken Blanchard says, "*There's a difference between interest and commitment. When you're interested in doing something, you do it only when it's convenient. When you're committed to something, you accept no excuses.*" To be good soil, is to be a person who is committed to serving Christ to the best of their abilities, to be a person who is willing to make sacrifices, sacrifices that are necessary in the serving of Christ's kingdom. People who work and witness to bear fruit that does not perish. Our responsibility is to open ourselves up to God's prompting, to pursue his work, to understand and to learn from it and to bring that understanding to the church and to the world, with patience and hopeful expectation that the final victory belongs to our God through Jesus Christ. Let anyone with ears listen.

God has many things to do in history. He has created the natural world and everything that is in it. He cares for nations and individuals, he set the sun and the stars in their courses, but his most important job, his delight and his joy is sowing the seeds of his word for the benefit of his creation, that benefit you and me. In Matthew's Gospel, all of the other activities of God are secondary.

Because there's power in seeds. Life springs forth from seeds. It feeds individuals and families and communities and it becomes a bountiful harvest. The word that's used in

the Bible here is the Greek word “*didomi*” to *bring forth*. It has the connotation of bringing forth a gift and in the New Testament it's often used to describe Jesus' gift of love in the giving of his life. That is the kind of bringing forth that is promised to you and to me, brothers and sisters. And at the center of this story is the Word, the seed, nothing else seems to matter. For all of our spiritual disciplines; reading, prayer, *lectio divina*, or even just communing with nature, God has given us the freedom as individuals to find that unique path for each one of us. Left open, as long as the word of God is at the center of it. And the Bible promises that then you will have fruit, right faith, living generosity, fruitful faith. It rises out of our interaction with that Word of God.

Our task is to be receptive to the seed, that special word that God has for each one of us and collectively as a community of faith. The bearing of fruit can come to us in so many different ways, as Jesus said. We might experience abundance a hundredfold or sixtyfold or thirtyfold. But all our spiritual work begins at the feet of Jesus listening to God's word.

Matthew the writer of our gospel is the only one to call it the *Word of the Kingdom*, language that infuses every aspect of our spiritual life. Paul in Romans says that “faith comes by hearing.” Martin Luther used to call the church a *Mouth House*, a place where there is speaking and listening and readings and sharing and preaching and teaching and listening. And the early Reformers had as one of their mottos *Sola Scriptura*, *Only Scripture*, only the Bible, a motto for their movement within the church catholic.

It doesn't mean that it will be easy for you and for me. There will be lots of pitfalls for us to watch out for. There will be hard paths in your life, rocky times to shake your faith and moments of pain that prick your soul and lead to doubt and uncertainty. But, if you are open, if we open our hearts as good soil receptive to God's Word, you and I will come to know the abundance of life in God's kingdom that Jesus promises. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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