

Albany Presbyterian Church

July 12th, 2026. Matthew 13:1-8, 18-23 Parable of Sower

Today, we read from Matthew 13, where Jesus began teaching people about the Kingdom of God, and this is the well-known Parable of the Sower. As in chapter 11, Jesus and his twelve disciples travelled throughout Galilee, teaching in synagogues, healing the sick, and casting out demons. In chapter 12, Jesus was challenged in the synagogue on the Sabbath when he encountered a man with a shrivelled hand. They debated whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath, and Jesus responded by healing the man. He then reminded those testing him that a person's value is greater than the law and that doing good on the Sabbath is more important than keeping the law. Jesus also healed a man who was mute and blind, enabling him to see and speak. Yet opposition continued, with some accusing Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebul. Jesus responded, "If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?" In Matthew 12:30, he says, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."

Despite the growing opposition, Matthew tells us that there were also an overwhelming number of people who came to see him, wanting to hear him and be healed by him. So much so that on that day, he decided to sit in the

boat while the people gathered along the shore, and there he began teaching them about the Kingdom of God.

Firstly, Matthew tells us that most of Jesus' teaching was in parables, stories often crafted using nature or agricultural practices, such as sowing the seed, to illustrate a point. This was also the practice of ancient Israel, using everyday imagery to help listeners make sense of something extraordinary, the wisdom from heaven. Sometimes the picture tells us more than the words can hold.

Jesus told this parable. A farmer went out to sow some seeds. As he scattered them, some fell along the path, some fell on rocky ground, and some fell among the thorns. The seeds on the path were eaten by birds, and those on the rocky ground were scorched by the sun, so they could not even take root because the soil was not deep enough, and they withered. The ones among the thorns could not grow because the thorns choked the plant. Finally, some of these seeds fell on the good soil, which produced a crop, a hundredfold, sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold of what was sown.

Usually, the parables Jesus told were left unexplained and could be confusing. As Jesus explains, it is a way of giving more to those who already have an abundance, and whoever does not have will have even what he already has taken away from him. To all those who want to receive God's teaching and who are eager to hear more, more will be given, with greater spiritual understanding. But those whose hearts are full of doubt and suspicion will be reluctant to receive, and so will take away whatever insight they have.

Lucky for us, this parable is explained. The seeds that fall **on the path** are like someone who hears the message about the Kingdom of God and does not understand it; the evil one comes like a bird and snatches away what was sown in their heart. The seeds falling **on rocky ground** refer to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy, but since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly run away, leaving their faith. The seed falls **among the thorns**, referring to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

Augustine says faith is a journey of the heart. In his prayer, he says our hearts were restless until they rest in you, and, like the Sower, the seed, and the soil of our hearts, faith begins with hearing the Word, understanding its truth, overcoming life's obstacles, and bearing lasting fruit. The condition of the heart determines how faith grows; we need to till and tend the ground to make it receptive through prayer, studying the Word and the Holy Spirit's transformation, which gives us understanding of the Word.

And that the Word of God is the power of God. As Isaiah 55:10-13 says, read this morning, just as the rain and snow fall on the earth, they do not return to where they came from without bringing forth life, joy, lasting renewal, and growth. The Word of God comes and accomplishes its purpose and what he desires. Isaiah 55 is a parable in itself, in which the Word of God is true and will come to its fulfillment no matter what. Here, God speaks to those who do not believe, who are still in exile, who have seen no end to their suffering. For the Word of God is as true as snow or rain waters the land, and he will bring joy and the restoration of peace as the trees clap their hands. God will restore them, turning a thornbush into a juniper tree and a brier into a myrtle and make them great again.

Reflecting on the Parable of the Sower, I think it is not only about those who oppose Jesus and those who fall victim to their treachery. This parable is also about those who struggle to be the good soil in which the seed of faith can be planted and grow to its full potential. This can be true for all of us at any time in our lives.

For we may have times when our hearts are hardened, and we let the Word of God pass us by, our hearts untouched, with no understanding or change. We sometimes fail to move beyond the excitement we felt when we first heard the Word of God, and we do not take the time to go deeper with God and His Word. Soon, all the excitement fades, and we grow distant from God. And when life becomes hard, or in our plenty, we feel we no longer need God, and our faith grows cold. But we long for a time when we hear the Word and seek understanding, which leads us to practice our faith in everything we do and to bear fruit of our faith. Our life is transformed, and the blessing becomes a hundredfold, sixtyfold, or thirtyfold.

Faith firmly rooted in the heart transforms how we live, shapes our decisions, and enables us to overcome our challenges.

You know the story of Jimmy Carter, the former president of the United States of America. Regardless of what you think of his politics, despite the global oil crisis and diplomatic challenges, he made his faith the foundation of his humility, integrity, and goodness. His faith was the fertile soil from which fruit of faith, a hundredfold, sixtyfold, or thirtyfold, grew in his work for peace, showing mercy, and doing good to those around him. He said, "My faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I am, whenever I can, for as long as I can, with whatever I have, to try to make a difference."

Speaking from his experience of seeing people in great suffering in the Second World War, in Auschwitz. Viktor Frankl, in his book "Man's Search for Meaning," says that he who has a "why" to live can bear almost any "how." The seed planted in good soil grows into the whys, giving us courage and strength to live through almost anything. Faith, deeply rooted in the love of God, strengthens one's life and sense of meaning.

What does this parable tell us about our faith, where we are and where God wants us to be?

Today, we are invited to examine our hearts, the condition of our soil, for the seed of faith is the word of God, whose fruit depends entirely on the soil of our hearts. Is our heart ready to welcome the Word and to grow deeply and faithfully? Does our faith stand up against life's distractions and challenges?