

Lectionary 15 Year A 2020
July 12, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

For some church communities this morning, you might hear a sermon about how it is important for us to make sure that we are good soil, listening to God's word and letting it dwell in us so that we grow in faith and bear good fruit. And while that's certainly a nice thing to strive for, I don't think it's the point of this gospel reading, and it certainly doesn't fit with our identity as Lutherans.

Most people want to be good soil, I'm sure. We want to be people that walk the walk, and talk the talk, and do everything that a so-called "good Christian" would do—whatever that is. Some people have a checklist that they believe will make sure they're good soil—don't drink, don't smoke, don't dance, and don't swear, to name a few. Others maybe think of saints like Mother Theresa, or Oscar Romero, or even a family member or friend that they have thought exemplified the Christian lifestyle.

The problem is that we have a hard time actually living this way. It only takes one look through Luther's explanation of the Ten Commandments to see the ways that we've fallen short and failed to be good soil. Perhaps we've looked to money or possessions for security rather than to God. Perhaps we have failed to respect our parents or other authorities. Perhaps we have acted in ways that endanger the lives or livelihood of our neighbors, caring for our own comfort and happiness over the safety of others. Perhaps we've profited from the oppression of others, either economically or socially, by pushing others down in order that we might get a good deal or get ahead. Perhaps we've been jealous of others and their possessions. Or my personal favorite, perhaps we have failed to interpret our neighbor's actions in the best light possible.

When we're honest with ourselves, we know that we're not always the good, perfect soil that is fully prepared and ready to bear fruit in God's kingdom, acting always with generosity and compassion, and striving for justice for those who are oppressed. We know that we fall short. Like the Apostle Paul said in last week's reading from Romans, "I do not do the good that I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." Sometimes, it feels nearly impossible to put our faith into action and be good soil that bears good fruit for God's world.

We've probably all experienced times when we've felt more like the path, or the rocky ground or the thorns. Maybe in the midst of this pandemic it's become too hard to keep up with our faith and caring for our community, and we've fallen away like the seed on the path. Or maybe we've been scorched and burnt by this world a few too many times, and like the seeds on rocky soil, we feel withered and worn with nothing left to give. Or perhaps we're like the seed that has fallen among thorns, and even though we're crying out for justice, our voice is choked out by other louder, more powerful voices like George Floyd experienced as he pleaded with the police, crying, "I can't breathe." When we feel more like the path or the rocky ground or the thorns, it's hard to bear good fruit.

And so maybe a message about striving to be good soil just feels pretty hopeless and out of reach. But like I said, I don't think that's what this parable is about. If this parable were about what kind of soil we are, Jesus would have called it the "Parable of the Soil." But Jesus very intentionally calls this parable the "Parable of the Sower."

This parable isn't about us and whether or not we're able to live our faith well. In this parable, Jesus isn't trying to teach us about ourselves; Jesus is trying to teach us about God. And

what we hear in this parable is that *all places are touched by God's word. All places are touched by God's word.*

No matter whether we feel like we're the path, or the rocky ground, or among the thorns, or if we feel like good soil, the good news of this parable, is that God's word and God's promises come to us no matter where we are.

We are loved and touched by God no matter where our life has wandered. And especially in the midst of this pandemic, when we may feel disconnected from our brothers and sisters in Christ, and even disconnected from God, this passage reminds us that God reaches us wherever we are, because *all places are touched by God's word.*

God's word knows no bounds. Like the seed that is scattered widely and abundantly, even in imperfect conditions, God's word comes to us even when, and especially when we're not in the best condition to receive it. God's word comes to us as forgiveness when we've done wrong. God's word comes to us as guidance when we're lost. God's word comes to us as peace when we're in distress. God's word comes to us as love when we feel unworthy. *All places and all people are touched by God's word.*

And so, even when we're struggling to put our faith into action, and even when we feel unworthy of God's love, we can trust that God continues to put God's word inside of us. God writes it on our hearts, and promises that we will be forever loved and held by God. Thanks be to God. Amen.