

**7.10.22 – Pentecost 5**  
**“How Do You Sow God’s Word?”**  
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Mark 4:1-20 (NIV) ~ Pam**

*Parable of the Farmer Scattering Seed*

<sup>1</sup> Once again Jesus began teaching by the lakeshore. A very large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat in the boat while all the people remained on the shore. <sup>2</sup> He taught them by telling many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:

<sup>3</sup> “Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. <sup>4</sup> As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it. <sup>5</sup> Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn’t have deep roots, it died. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain. <sup>8</sup> Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!” <sup>9</sup> Then he said, “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”

<sup>10</sup> Later, when Jesus was alone with the twelve disciples and with the others who were gathered around, they asked him what the parables meant.

<sup>11</sup> He replied, “You are permitted to understand the secret of the Kingdom of God. But I use parables for everything I say to outsiders, <sup>12</sup> so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled:

‘When they see what I do,  
they will learn nothing.  
When they hear what I say,  
they will not understand.  
Otherwise, they will turn to me  
and be forgiven.’”

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “If you can’t understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables? <sup>14</sup> The farmer plants seed by taking God’s word to others. <sup>15</sup> The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message, only to have Satan come at once and take it away. <sup>16</sup> The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. <sup>18</sup> The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God’s word, <sup>19</sup> but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced. <sup>20</sup> And the seed that fell on good soil represents those who hear and accept God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”

**L: These are the perplexing Words of Christ. C: Thanks be to God!**

**Matthew 13:1-23 (NRSVUE) ~ Pam**

*The Parable of the Sower*

<sup>1</sup> That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. <sup>2</sup> Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. <sup>3</sup> And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seeds fell on a path, and the birds came and ate them up. <sup>5</sup> Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun rose, they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup> Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup> Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup> If you have ears, hear!”

*The Purpose of the Parables*

<sup>10</sup> Then the disciples came and asked him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” <sup>11</sup> He answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. <sup>12</sup> For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. <sup>13</sup> The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.’ <sup>14</sup> With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

‘You will indeed listen but never understand,  
and you will indeed look but never perceive.

<sup>15</sup> For this people’s heart has grown dull,  
and their ears are hard of hearing,  
and they have shut their eyes,  
so that they might not look with their eyes,  
and hear with their ears  
and understand with their heart and turn—  
and I would heal them.’

<sup>16</sup> “But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. <sup>17</sup> Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

*The Parable of the Sower Explained*

<sup>18</sup> “Hear, then, the parable of the sower. <sup>19</sup> When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. <sup>20</sup> As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, <sup>21</sup> yet such a person has no root but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. <sup>22</sup> As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of this age and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. <sup>23</sup> But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

**L: These are Instructive Words from Jesus! C: Thanks be to God.**

**Please pray with me:**

Creator God, we thank you for the Bible Study, Worship and Fellowship already experienced today and every Sunday. May it stimulate our thinking, nourish our souls, and bring us closer to you. Help us to be the farmer who scatters more seed than we think will grow. Strengthen our faith to know that you fertilize the hearts and soil of those who want to know **you**. And Lord, may we be attentive today and every day, listening for your direction as the Holy Spirit speaks through this messenger. Amen.

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What a joyful Sunday we shared last week celebrating our freedom and a special birthday! And this Sunday, as you heard is Sandie Potter's special day, and Wednesday is Ruby Kingsbury's birthday. We have others coming up later in the month too. July, I think is one of our biggest birthday months.

Birthdays and the Scriptures today are all about growth, aren't they? You may wonder why I read two seemingly identical passages. They are from two different Gospel writers and different translations, but this is one powerful parable that did not vary much between the two. In fact, this parable appears in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas. This important parable is familiar and has been authenticated multiple times. So, let's "dig" in (that pun was for Charles).

The crowds coming to hear Jesus' teachings were beginning to get larger, so he set out from shore in a boat. He didn't go far, just far enough to not be swallowed up by the multitudes. It was a small cove, so the sound and acoustics were perfect for him to be heard by all. Mark 4:1-34 are nicknamed "parables by the sea." And although Jesus is teaching there, the true setting of the story is a farm, as shown on the bulletin cover; that image is a painting, *Sower at Sunset*, 1888 by Vincent Van Gogh. You can see the farmer would "broadcast" throw the seed (or

scatter it) and then plow it into the soil. Clumps of thistles and sometimes rocks would be plowed under. See in your mind's eye the rhythmic swing of the sower's arm. Who do you think the farmer is in the Scripture? It is easy to assume the farmer was Creator God, but he or she is actually Jesus or **any of his ministers who share the Word** of God. So, as we continue to break it down, remember that you too are the farmer!

This parable was told as both an exhortation and encouragement to the disciples. Jesus was still the Messianic secret to the Kingdom at this time, but he was preparing his disciples with knowledge and willpower to carry on his message after he suffered. As you re-read it this week, **listen** for the warnings, the hope, and promise of God's kingdom both personally and corporately as a church; listen for the small beginnings of a little seed, three obstacles of birds, rocks, and thorns, and then the big ending of an abundant harvest. Let's remind ourselves of the details:

1.) The scattered seed fell on the well-traveled and compacted soil of the footpath. It could not penetrate the soil, so birds of the field (some say Satan) snatched the seed away for food, and it could not grow. *[no growth]*

2.) There were rocky places where the farmer had plowed under some rocks, and the seed could grow a little bit in the soil, but the rocks kept it from developing deep roots. *[shallow dry growth]*

3.) The thorns that had been plowed under with the thistle would also grow in the soil and would choke out the seed and steal the soil's nutrition. *[stunted growth]*

4.) Finally, good soil that was fertilized and cleared of obstructions would produce an abundant harvest. A normal good harvest would

be 10 to 1; and the good soil produces 30, 60 and 100 times the number of seed planted. *[full growth]*

Even if you are not a gardener or farmer, you can imagine that the people hearing Jesus could relate to the simple language and metaphors of their day. Later, Jesus interpreted the parable more clearly for his disciples, tying it into hearing God's word. We speak of it often as spiritual growth parallels, and equally, it refers to how we share God's word and our testimony with others (or not). Paul writes in Romans 10:14 <sup>ESV</sup>: "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" True, there are many who will **never** listen, those who have minds as impenetrable as the hard footpath soil. And there are people whose hearts are so filled with "rocks" of trauma or anger that they listen and are excited for a "minute" or a Sunday sermon, but roots will not take hold, and the seedlings die. And there are many with thorns (distractions of the world – greed, lust, entertainment) that God's word will be choked out by other options. But take hope, there are also people for whom God has been preparing the soil; they are open and willing to learn and be transformed by His word. We try to minister to all of course, but our full attention must be on the good soil, the open minds, and hearts of the Savior-curious.

The Sower sows the seed widely, but not all seed bears fruit. Jesus is warning the disciples that their ministry must be shared widely (perhaps even a hint it will spread to the Gentiles, not just the Jews!), but they must understand that God will not allow all to hear His Word. They should not be discouraged by the number of converts or followers of the

Way. Some will accept Jesus, and some will reject Jesus. To followers, God gives insight and understanding to live and grow in faith. That is important for our discernment this year of “Listening for the Work.” Our hearts too must be open and fertile ground so through our tools of prayer, contemplation, Scripture reading, solitude, and silence, we can HEAR God speaking to us about next steps. Which of the four types of soil are you? Matthew says, “<sup>9</sup> If you have ears, hear!” Amen? Amen! //

**Will you pray with me?** Lord, help us to be more courageous and hope-filled disciples. You have prepared the soil for us, so let us be faithful in scattering the seeds of your Word and our personal testimonies. Help us to share the gospel with others, so that they may know you. We also need you to speak into **our** hearts and minds today and every day to fertilize our own soil and to give us direction. May your love and light shoot up from this soil into a glorious and abundant Kingdom harvest. **Amen.**