Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23; The Parable of the Sower and His Field I. The Sower II. The Fruitless Soil III. The Fruitful Soil

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, this morning we return to our study of parables with one of the first ones that Jesus told. Here in Mt. 13, Jesus speaks in and explains the purpose for parables. Remember that parables are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning told to blind the rebellious and enlighten the righteous. So parables are used to open and close, to reveal and hide. Through the parables, His work of election is being done. What little good that the wicked have will be taken away- while the true disciples will see the work of God in greater clarity. In other words, this parable is not about farming techniques and the best way to get plants to grow. Rather, Jesus is explaining the connection between preaching, regeneration and good works. So this morning we consider this theme: Jesus Christ sows the seed in this world to divide the righteous and the wicked.

**I. The Sower**

In our first point, we consider the sower and his work. A sower went out to sow. Now we may not be very familiar with this kind of agriculture, but basically, we have a farmer who is planting his seed in the field. The manner of planting was that of broadcast- so the farmer walks through his field with a bag of seed tied around his waist. He puts his hand into the bag and casts the seed out into the field. This is the fastest way to sow but it is also very indiscriminate. The seed goes all over the place within the field- it is not dropped into rows but spread to the wind. Children, maybe you have seen your dad planting grass seed in your front yard. He takes a handful of seed and casts it out on the open ground. The fields of this day were long, narrow tracts of land passed on for generations. Each field was surrounded by a path that marked the boundary between two families. But who is the sower in this parable? Well, Jesus is the one who is sowing the seed. It is Jesus who is the farmer here- and the work of sowing is actually being done even as Jesus speaks. Jesus is spreading the seed- or the Word of the kingdom is being distributed. The field here represents the people- those who are listening. As we will see, there is a diverse group of people coming to listen to Jesus for all sorts of reasons. Some good- and some bad. So the field and specifically the soil of the field will represent the listeners- or the state of their hearts. How will each person receive the Word? But we must also remember that Jesus is continuing to sow His seed even to this day. Whenever the message of the good news is being proclaimed- whenever the word of the kingdom is being shared- the seed is continuing to be spread. How does Jesus sow the seed- by the preaching! Proclaiming the good news of the kingdom is the way that the seed is shared and spread. Even here, at our church, this very morning! Jesus is sowing his seed! Now this seed falls on different kinds of hearers- not every heart receives the Word that is proclaimed. The same is true this morning. Before us is a field- but what kind of soil are you?

**II. The Fruitless Soil**

Now that we understand who the sower is and his work, in our second point we consider the fruitless soil. It is striking- as we read our parable- that there are so many kinds of fruitless soil. There are 3 different kinds of soil that remain without enduring life- only 1 kind of soil is good. In other words, there are many reasons why people do not receive the Word of God rightly- but there is only one reason why anyone can or will receive the Word rightly! The first kind of fruitless soil is explained in v. 19. This seed falls on the path, remains on the top of the ground and soon is gobbled up by birds. Now children, think back to when your dad was spreading grass seed on your lawn. Some of that seed likely fell on the sidewalk. The seed on the sidewalk remains on the hard surface. It does no good- and as soon as you walk away the birds will come and eat that seed. Now this hard ground, Jesus says, is like someone whose heart is hard. Like the hard packed dirt that has been trampled by men- some people come to church with a rebellious attitude. Hearing they do not hear! They sit under the preaching, but they have not come to listen to the Son. They are unmoved, and they have little desire to grow in grace and knowledge of the truth. These hard hearts are like rocks upon which the water falls. No humility- they keep their ears closed, and their hearts remain hard. These kinds of people do not understand and have no desire to understand either. As soon as they leave, the devil snatches this seed, and the poor miserable sinner goes on with his life unchanged. There is a clear warning here- that if you do not embrace the Word and hide it in your heart, the devil might come and take that word away! The second kind of fruitless soil is that of the rocky ground explained in v. 20. In Judea, there are areas where limestone is found only a few inches under the soil. NW Iowa has a section like this near the Rock River. No fields are found here- because the rock hinders the seed. There is no depth of earth to be found here. So when the seed is planted, the first signs of life are quick to appear. But when persecution comes, these plants are withered and dried up. The heat of persecution dries up the life of the plant and it is reduced to nothing. These kinds of people may have a temporary but superficial joy. When everything goes good, they are happy to be numbered with the saints. But the fire of persecution and trial has a way of exposing what lives in the heart. They are fair weather believers. Their faith has no true root. Christianity is a social thing- they are just trying to fit in. So these also do not bear fruit. The third kind of fruitless soil is that which is sown among the thorns in v. 22. Some of the seed falls among a patch of weeds- particularly thorns and thistles. These kinds of weeds have a well-established tap root and their grip on the land is firm. So when the seed falls on these kind of hearts- those that already are infested with thistles- the seed is crowded out. The room is already occupied. The small plants are choked by the cares and concerns of this world. The deceitfulness of riches are more important than the word and spiritual life. These kinds of people are more interested in money, pleasures and the passing hobbies of the flesh. They are known to go to church for a while- but soon they only show up once in a while- and eventually they are never seen at all. They are too busy- they have better things to do in their own view. To properly receive the word, you must be singular in your desire and focus. The Kingdom of God must be sought first- above all others. To be clear, what unites these 3 kinds of soil is their lack of fruit! These three kinds of hearers were present with Jesus when he was telling this parable. Some were his enemies- trying to trap and trick Jesus. This is the hard path kind of heart. Others are simply looking for joy a passing happiness- Jesus teaches with authority. His words tickle our ears- we feel good when we are by Jesus. But as soon as persecution comes, they will fade away. And still others are coming because they have got a free meal. Jesus gave them bread and filled their bellies. But soon the pressing needs of daily grind will pull them away from Jesus- never to return. An application is clear here- be careful what kind of soil you are! Be careful how you hear- be mindful of the way in which you receive God’s Word! It must be implanted in you- it must find a home in your heart and it must endure in the production of fruit! True faith is a living, active and fruitful faith! There are many things in this world that are always working against us! The devil wants to snatch the word from our heart. Persecution and trial want to keep us shallow and easily shaken. The cares and concerns of this world want to keep us busy so that our faith is crowded out! So the fault is not in the message but in the heart of the one who receives that message!

**III. The Fruitful Soil**

But praise God, there is yet another kind of soil! So in v. 23 we read of the good soil. Now good soil is known for its depth. It has room to grow. Not on the path and not on the rocks. It is not among the thorns and thistles. No- the good soil is ready and able to receive the word with gladness and respond with fruit. So the good soil reveals the marks of a good hearer- one who receives the word and that word remains deeply rooted within. They hear the gospel preaching of the kingdom with open heart and mind. They understand and respond accordingly. They receive, believe and produce faith. As I said before, there is only one kind of good soil. And there is only one reason why any soil would be good, and that reason is attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit! By nature, we are all hard, packed and unwilling. In other words, unless the Spirit prepare the soil and bless the seed with life, it will not be fruitful! But if the Spirit sees fit to perform this regenerating work, you can rest assured that this seed will indeed be fruitful! So by the Holy Spirit, this listener is like good, tilled and fruitful soil just waiting for the seed. Prepared by the Spirit- and ready for the Word. This one is then born again by the Spirit as the Word is hidden in their heart. As Psalm 119 says, I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. So the good soil is the fruitful soil- and it yields a harvest. Now the extent of this harvest is not always the same. Some make a better return for this sower. Some return 30, 60 or even 100 fold. But rest assured, all make a good return for the master. In other words, the seed does not fall on deaf ears and the seed does not return void. As Isaiah 55 puts it, “my word be that goes forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” The purpose of this seed is to produce this very harvest! Whatever may be lost on the road, on the rocks or among the thorns is more than overcompensated by these fruitful plants and their good return! The fact is, we all have different talents, abilities and opportunities. We are all called to different work and we have different gifts. But the fact remains, every living plant will be fruitful! We will all and we all must make a return for our Lord! As Heb. 6 puts it, “land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God.” So our God- the Lord of the harvest- blessing those in His kingdom who make a good yield and return of fruit!

To conclude, the first parable in our series is explaining a humbling truth. God is sovereign over the seed and the soil. Only the soil that the Spirit prepares and blesses will be able to produce fruit. And yet, we must take heed to the state of our own hearts! So we pray for the Spirit to give us eyes to see and ears to hear- and that by the Spirit we too might be fruitful in our God’s kingdom! Jesus Christ sows the seed in this world to divide the righteous and the wicked. Many visitors come and go to church- many different kinds of soil pass through these doors. We cannot always discern what kind of reception the word has- but the seed must continue to be sown! The word of Jesus must continue to be spread! And this seed will produce fruit in us! For every branch that abides in Jesus will produce fruit! And by our fruit, the kind of soil we are will be known!