**St. Paul’s Lutheran Church
Wildwood, Missouri**

**Sixth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23**

**July 12, 2020**

 In our gospel for today, Jesus says, *“He who has ears, let him hear.”* Through our ears is how God works in our lives. Not our eyes. Not our nose. Not our touch. He speaks. He talks. He *“says”* and, as he does so, what he says, what he speaks, is deposited in our ears. His Word is spoken. It is proclaimed. It is announced. It is preached. The Word travels from the mouth to the ear. It enters through the outer opening, travels down the ear canal, striking first the ear drum and then our heart.

 It is a strange way our Lord has decided to communicate with us, isn’t it? We prefer our eyes don’t we? We prefer what we see. After all*, “seeing is believing,”* right? Well, not with Jesus. Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of God and so the seed of Christ’s Word is sown; it is scattered on the soil of our hearts that saving faith might be produced. Today, Jesus teaches us *The Parable of the Seed and the Soil* and what we see is that the Word of Christ gets four kinds of hearing when it is preached: a hardened hearing, a shallow hearing, a conflicted hearing or a fruitful hearing.

 Listen again to the parable: *“A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has hears, let him hear.”*

 Right away we notice something odd about this sower: he doesn’t seem to care where the seed falls. If you have ever made the drive along I-55 from St. Louis to Chicago you come to realize that it is basically through 250 miles of corn fields. Have you ever noticed how neat and tidy fields of corn are? Everything is perfectly spaced in nice, precise, perfectly cultivated rows. Not here in this parable, though. The sower in Jesus’ parable just kind of tosses it out there. He doesn’t even prepare the soil by tilling it or anything. He simply scatters the seed and lets it fall where it may.

 That’s what Jesus was doing when he preached this parable; he scattered the seed of his Word upon whoever happened to be there; the devout, the religious, the seeker, the sinner, the skeptic, the broken-hearted, the burdened, the comfortable, and the self-righteous. He didn’t care where it fell because they were all people just like all of us gathered here this morning. There is no need to be careful with who hears because all people need to hear. All people, without discrimination, need to come to a knowledge of him who saves.

 I think there is an important lesson for us to learn with the recklessness of the sower and I think that lesson is that we can be too cautious in our broadcasting of the Word. We are too concerned with how we package the seed, or the Word, than we are with scattering on the soil of sinful hearts. I have heard this so many times; I have even heard it from some of you*, “I want to share Jesus, but I’m concerned about what to say.”* We all know what to say. We have heard it a thousand times in church. The message is of our God who was not just gracious, but gracious to me and who desires to be gracious to all people. The message is that in Jesus, by his death and resurrection, he has granted me eternal life. The message is that Jesus wants to give all people eternal life where we will be free from the difficulties that life in this broken world so often brings. That’s the message. That’s the seed. If we wait until we giftwrap it in just the proper way, we will never get it out.

 The sower just tosses it out there. He broadcasts the death and resurrection of Jesus to the wind, letting it fall wherever it lands. The sower never asks the soil what it wants or what it would prefer because he already knows the soil needs the seed. He sows the glorious message of the gospel. He broadcasts the seeds of forgiveness, hope and peace with God to everyone. Keep that in mind the next time you think that someone is not *“ready”* to hear the gospel until it is giftwrapped in just the right way or that you’re not ready to speak it. Speak it anyway for the seed does the work. You and I don’t.

 Now, in so doing, some of that seed will fall on the path, the path made hard by years of footsteps, compressing and condensing the soil to be as hard as pavement. The Word of Christ makes it through the ear alright but it is not comprehended. It hits the hardened, calloused and impenitent heart. It hits the heart that says, *“There is nothing wrong with me. I’m fine on my own and have no need of Jesus or his forgiveness.”* This is the hearing that sees Sunday services as a foolish waste of time, the study of God’s Word as futile and the receiving of our Lord’s Sacraments as a bother rather than a gift. The Word is sown, it is heard but the soil of the hearts is so hard that it cannot take root. In essence, the soil rejects the seed.

 Now, there is a bit of a warning here for us all, even we believers. We need to recognize the dangers of this hardening inside each of our hearts. Let’s be honest, even as Christians, we have a hard time recognizing our own sin, don’t we? It’s not that I can’t recognize sin. Oh, no. I can see your sin with perfect clarity but not mine. And so we hear God’s Word preached, especially his Law which convicts, and somehow we think it is meant for the person sitting in the pew next to me and not for me. We stubbornly resist acknowledging our own sin and that there really is something wrong with us. And here is the problem: when we resist, our hearts grow harder and harder.

 That hardness manifests itself in many ways. It is why we get bored with church. It is why we tire of reading our bibles. It is why we can’t remember what was said in a sermon five minutes after it was done and why we would rather stay at home or in bed on a Sunday morning than hunger for the Lord’s Supper.

 Jesus says that the seed which falls on the hardened path gets gobbled up by the birds. God permits the devil to come and snatch the gospel away. This, I have to admit, is one of the characteristics of God that I have always found amazing: he forces no one to listen to him. What he gives is always given as a gift and, thus, it is open to rejection. He forces no one to accept it. However, in rejecting his Word, in rejecting him, one suffers the consequences: Satan snatches him away.

 As he sows, some of the seed falls on rocky soil. This is the thin and shallow emotionalism which so sadly has infected so much of American Christianity. It is a superficial understanding of Jesus’ love long on sentiment and short on the cross. This is the Christian equivalent of lite-beer: all the bubbles but half the calories and half the taste. There is lots of talk of Jesus’ love, but no shed blood because that is repulsive; no sacrifice because that is archaic and primitive; there is no call to repentance for that is personally offensive; no cost of disciples because that is too demanding; and no deep faith because that asks too much. It is the religion of the easy chair instead of the cross.

 The seed sprouts quickly and growth seems to be there but with no depth of soil in which to plant one’s roots, the plant is vulnerable, it cannot survive the heat of the noon day sun. The Word is heard and received with immediate enthusiasm but the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart turns out to be only a temporary zeal when the inevitable difficulties of life come our way.

 Many within Christendom have predicted that Christians in the United States will soon begin to suffer persecution for standing up for what they believe. It’s a scary thought, isn’t it? We have been largely protected from overt persecution. However, if it does happen, I wonder how we would endure. Would we be here this morning if our gatherings were declared illegal? How many would come to hear the Word of Christ and receive his Sacraments if doing so guaranteed our martyrdom? I realize this is serious stuff but how deeply rooted in Christ would we be if being one of his followers meant prison? Will a shallow faith survive?

 This is why, in truth, the Christian faith is described as *“faithful endurance.”* We are in this for the long haul and we need to have our roots firmly established in God’s Word and his Sacraments. Our goal is the final resurrection and only when our faith is deeply rooted in the shed blood of Jesus will we make it. Only then.

 Some seed falls among the thorns and the thorns choke out the young seedlings. This is a conflicted hearing of God’s Word. Christ is preached and heard but there are so many distractions in life which clamor for our attention. In all seriousness, if there is a danger I see for the church in America today this is it. There is so much competition out there that is trying to convince you and your children that everything else is more important than church. Sunday mornings, which used to be sacrosanct so that we might spend time with God, are now just another day of the week. Have you noticed the explosion in recent years of children’s sports programs and the emphasis placed on them? Children’s sports, now routinely scheduled on Sunday mornings, have become an idol as we all believe our child will be the next great superstar. A couple of years back there was even a church in Jefferson City, MO that cancelled its Sunday worship services (and I kid you not) in order to host a girls’ volleyball tournament. Work, recreation, club sports have a way of creeping in and convincing us that if we do not participate even on Sunday, we or our children will never get ahead in life. The seed sown into our hearts gets choked out because everything else in life is deemed more important. That is a very shortsighted view.

 My dear friends in Christ, Jesus tells us this parable because you and I are that field into which that heavenly Sower sows his seed. You are the soil in which he plants his seed and his desire is that his seed would take root in our hearts and yield a fruitful harvest. His desire is to turn us into good soil. That is his goal. It is only you and I who, due to the hardness of our hearts, our shallow faith, or our conflicted priorities, squeeze out the seed he desires to plant. Yet, and this is a big *“yet,”* he still wants us to be good soil.

 Actually, let me restate that, “*he wants to turn us into good soil.”* We cannot turn ourselves into good soil, only the Sower can do that. Just as no soil tills itself, no heart is self-softening. God does the tilling and he does so through his Law. He breaks up the soil. He removes the stones. He does it with his commandments which show us our sin and clear away our pride, our self-centeredness and our self-righteousness. He weeds out the distractions. He tends to us, he fertilizes us, so to speak, with his Word as he teaches us about all that he has done for us through Christ our Savior.

 That’s what is going on in this parable. God is making good soil out of you by sowing into your hearts Christ Jesus. It is he, the One who bore our sins to the cross, the one who forgives all of our sins, who is planted within us. And, it is he who yields the harvest of faith – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. It Jesus who bears fruit in us that we, firmly rooted in him, might, as did the Sower, wantonly and brazenly scatter more seed for the harvest to come and to the glory of God. And it is he, who, thanks be to God, has given each of us ears which not only hear, but believe and understand the power of the cross of Jesus, the power of the Gospel to save. For in that seed that was scattered through our ears and into our hearts is life; eternal life. There is no greater gift that God can give and he has given it to you and to me. He has scattered. He has sown it and he gives the seed its power to grow inside each of you that it may yield fruit to his glory. This is how our Lord works. This is how he saves.

 *“He who has ears . . . let him hear.”* In Jesus’ name. Amen.