

Scripture Reading:

Luke 8:4 “4 And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: 5 "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. 6 Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. 7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. 8 But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold." When He had said these things He cried, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" 9 Then His disciples asked Him, saying, "What does this parable mean?" 10 And He said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.' 11 "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12 Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. 13 But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. 14 Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. 15 But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.”

The Parable of the Sower

Parable: A short simple story intended to illustrate a moral or religious lesson. In the Gospel of Luke as well as Matthew and Mark, we often read, “And Jesus told them a parable” This was an important part of the teaching of Jesus and He tells us in Mark’s account that understanding this one properly is very important:

Mark 4:13 “And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?”

The parable of the sower is given in all three Gospels with Luke giving the shortest account. Mark shows its importance and Matthew includes many more warning for the Jews.

- Luke places this lesson about bearing fruit right after the verses about those faithful women who were serving Jesus!

Jesus wants to make sure that we understand where these good works of thankfulness & service come from! So He tells a simple parable and then explains what it means.

- We must hear His explanation and pray that we understand what is described and accept what it means!

Verse 5: “A sower went out to sow his seed” [explain this picture]

The seed fell in four different places:

Wayside: Hardpan, birds simply come along and have a feast

Rocky ground: Seeds can sprout but the plants are very short lived: “withered for lack of moisture.”

Among thorns: Again, seeds can sprout but are choked.

Good ground: Plants sprang up and produced fruit with patience.

Matthew and Mark add that the bountiful harvest could be thirty or sixty as well as one-hundred-fold.

Then Jesus proclaims: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

Jesus is calling on those who have received the gift of faith to “hear and do” His words – Like the wise ones described near the end of the Sermon on the Mount who “heard & did” the words of Jesus, building on the solid foundation!

- **His disciples ask what the parable means: An honest question that gets an honest answer from Jesus.**

We read in all three accounts: “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God” As Jesus explained, the least Saint in the Kingdom of God is now greater than John the Baptist. To them the mystery has been revealed: Just like the women whose sins were forgiven!

“But to the rest it is given in parables, that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand!’” – Just like Simon who had Jesus in his home or all the others who witnessed the miracles.

Jesus then explains the parable in a way that is not hard to understand: The seed is the Word of God: The Word that is heard in all four cases

The first case is like Simon who refused to hear what Jesus was saying even as he sat at dinner in his home, or the Pharisees who were filled with rage when Jesus healed the man’s withered hand on the Sabbath!

The second group hears with joy, but has no root: Those who hear but fail to do the teachings of Jesus! We have seen these in the crowds, and we will see many more as we move through Luke and Acts.

The third group also ‘hears’ but then allows the cares, riches & pleasures of life” to choke the plant so there is no fruit: The rich young ruler comes to mind here or those who needed to sell a field or bury a relative before they could follow Jesus!

The final group is where the word is heard “with a noble good heart” is kept and bears fruit with patience.”

- **The bottom line lesson, of the parable that Jesus says is the key to all the others, is that this ground represents good hearts that produce much fruit!**

It is all about bearing fruit, as Paul clearly explains in Ephesians 2:10 saying Christians were “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

**This parable teaches us that good hearts will produce fruit:
As we learned in our series of messages on the Book of James: “Faith without works is dead.”**

- **Hearing the Word is not enough**
- **Believing the Word is not enough**
- **Even growing is not enough**
- **Good soil produces fruit, a bountiful harvest!**

BUT as we learned last week with the thankful woman, we must be careful not to learn the wrong lesson, to get things backwards.

- **The good works that Paul & James reference do NOT produce saving faith**
- **Just as the fruit in this parable did NOT produce the good soil.**

I think that Jesus makes this a central parable because the image of good soil or ground is a powerful one for those who know their Bibles: The words, ground, soil or earth appears over 1,000 times in the Scriptures!

This parable draws on the power of that imagery to teach a very simple lesson: The Word of God bears fruit when it is planted in good soil.

So the critical question should be:

- **Where does this “good soil” come from?**

In verse 12, Jesus says of the hardpan or pathway, that “the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts.”

In verse 15 Jesus says that the good ground “are those who, having a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.”

One a hardened heart and the other a noble heart...

This contrast should remind of us of how the Prophet Ezekiel described the salvation of God’s people:

Ezekiel 11:19 “Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.”

Or again in chapter 36, with farm imagery that Jesus draws upon in His parable of the sower:

Ezekiel 36:25 “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. 28 Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. 29 I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. 30 And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations.”

It is God, and ONLY God who can prepare the “good and noble heart”

- **God can plow the hardest path**
- **God can remove the rocks**
- **God can pull the thorn bushes**
- **God takes away the stony heart and gives us hearts of flesh.**

As a result, we are totally dependent upon God for the fruit of our evangelism and yet God expects us to be those sowers who spread the word. That is why the strongest arguments for God’s sovereignty in our salvation and the strongest call for our evangelism are right there next to each other in Romans chapters nine and ten: with the glorious conclusion in 10:17

- **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”**

Study these two chapters this week and see the wonder of the mystery that God has revealed to us as His Saints. So, it is important to remember that only one of the four places where the seed has fallen bears any fruit.

[note they don’t all have to be equal parts!]

- **Hard ground cannot plow itself**
- **Rocky ground cannot remove the rocks**
- **Thorn infested ground cannot pull out the thorns.**

All these examples of unbelief should remind us to pray for the lost: Only God can AND must change hearts! The promises given by the Prophet Ezekiel should give us the confidence to boldly proclaim the Gospel... Believing that God will exchange hearts of stone for hearts of flesh that can hear and respond to the Good News we have presented. At the same time, as Saints in Christ's Church, our focus must also be on the 'noble and good heart' which keeps God's Word and bears fruit with patience. Just as we see three types of worthless soil, Jesus speaks of three levels of fruitfulness: -- Thirty, sixty and a hundred fold!

What is this "fruit" and why did Jesus say there be different amounts of this fruit produced? Again, it is NOT simply hearing of the Word... That takes place in all four areas or types of ground.

It is not simply believing or having excitement; we see this with the rocky soil: Making decisions for Jesus and getting excited about God is not bearing fruit for the Kingdom and Jesus here says it WILL wither!

It is certainly not something that we can have along with the cares and riches of this world: Jesus says these distractions will win in the end, choking out the Word!

- **As certainly evidenced by the decline of the Western European churches and now American churches...**

IF you have not responded to the call of Jesus to repent, IF your response was shallow and emotional, or IF you just consider yourself a "Christian" along with everything else you are in life, then you need to pray that God would give you a new heart:

- **A believing heart that is noble, ready to keep God's commands and to bear much fruit.**

Again, as Saints we ask the question: If all of this is NOT the fruit that God is looking for, then what is it?

Ironically, we find the clearest answer in the Epistle written to the church that was in the most danger: Those at Galatia where works oriented heresies threatened their very souls:

Galatians 5:13 "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love

serve one another. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

We have not planned this, but Erik's message on "Love in the Law" next week will flesh this out I am sure!

16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh...

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

➤ All these we must avoid, but that is still not the fruit of this harvest!

22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control..."

➤ And I think that the Apostle Paul had this parable in mind when he continues this teaching in chapter six:

6 : 7 "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

➤ Obviously, as he is warning the Galatians about the dangers of a works based salvation, Paul is certainly NOT saying we need to be fruitful so we can be saved.

Like James, he is proclaiming that those who have the gift of saving faith will be fruitful – NOT just avoiding sin, but bearing much fruit:

➤ The fruit of the Spirit!

To better understand how we should apply all this, I want to turn to one of our great reformation creeds:

The Heidelberg Catechism!

Very helpful instructions on the Ten Commandments:

- **No need to ‘reinvent the wheel**
- **Good for us & our children!**

Question 105 . What doth God require in the sixth commandment?

Answer . That neither in thoughts, nor words, nor gestures, much less in deeds, I dishonor, hate, wound, or kill my neighbor, by myself or by another; but that I lay aside all desire of revenge: also, that I hurt not myself, nor willfully expose myself to any danger. Wherefore also the magistrate is armed with the sword, to prevent murder.

Yes, we should avoid sin!

But this is not the Fruit of the Spirit which leads to the next question:

Question 106 . But this commandment seems only to speak of murder?

Answer . In forbidding murder, God teaches us, that he abhors the causes thereof, such as envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge; and that he accounts all these as murder.

We must avoid even sinful motives, as Jesus said, He who hates a brother has committed murder in his heart.

BUT this is still not the fruit of the Spirit, so there is one more question:

Question 107 . But is it enough that we do not kill any man in the manner mentioned above?

Answer . No: for when god forbids envy, hatred, and anger, he commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves; to show patience, peace, meekness, mercy, and all kindness, towards him, and prevent his hurt as much as in us lies' and that we do good, even to our enemies.

In other words, we must demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit! A harvest of thirty, sixty or one hundred fold!

We see this again with the 8th Commandment “Do not steal”

Question 111 . But what doth God require in this commandment?

Answer . That I promote the advantage of my neighbor in every instance I can or may; and deal with him as I desire to be dealt with by others: further also that I faithfully labor, so that I may be able to relieve the needy.

Again with the 9th Commandment:

Question 112 . What is required in the ninth commandment?

Answer . That I bear false witness against no man, nor falsify any man's words; that I be no backbiter, nor slanderer; that I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly, or unheard; but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit, as the proper works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God; likewise, that in judgment and all other dealings I love the truth, speak it uprightly and confess it; also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honor and good character of my neighbor.

As Paul said to the Galatians, ESPECIALLY to those in the household of faith!

➤ **God desires that our lives be fruitful: Bearing fruit for His Kingdom.**

Bearing fruit and more fruit: If we are bearing thirty fold, He wants to take us to sixty. If we are bearing sixty He wants to take us to one hundred fold!

Listen to Jesus as He gives final instructions to His disciples:

**John 15:1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.
2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.
3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you."**

Jesus has given us clean hearts of flesh – HE has forgiven our sins!

4 “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If

anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

We must pray that we, as His Saints here at Church of the King, hear the words of Jesus with “Noble & Good” hearts, keeping His word and bearing MUCH fruit with patience!

Communion Meditation:

Ephesians 2:1-10 “**1** And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, **2** in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, **3** among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, **5** even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), **6** and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, **9** not of works, lest anyone should boast.

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”