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

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. **2** And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. **3** And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. **4** And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. **5** Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, **6** but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. **7** Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. **8** Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. **9**  He who has ears, let him hear.” **18**  “Hear then the parable of the sower: **19** When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. **20** As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, **21** yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. **22** As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. **23** As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

**“The Gift of Hearing”**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (Galatians 1:3-5). Parables were popular for Jesus to use with the crowds. However, what was popular to hear was not always easy to understand. When the disciples asked why He spoke using parables, his answer was somewhat shocking. He told them, “This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (Matthew 13:13).The chief and first parable told by Jesus, this story recorded in three of the four books of the Gospel, sets the tone.

What wonder are in those opening lines, “a sower went out to sow.” God spoke good news of a promise to Adam and Even just as He did through His prophets in the Old Testament. At the coming of Christ, the seed born of the Virgin Mary was God in the flesh sowing His promising Word in its fullness to repent and believe in the Gospel. Likewise, after His death and resurrection, Jesus sent out the Church to sow this salvation won by God’s sacrifice to, “the ends of the earth.” The sower going out to sow was never the problem. He generously throws seed everywhere without concern over what becomes of it. Jesus gives the real answer by ending His parable to the crowds declaring, “He who has ears, let him hear.” Hearing means to understand, but this story teaches that much stands in the way of God’s Word. Yet, one fact remains. A sower went out to sow.

Rather than viewing the different kinds of soil as some people being better than others. Jesus teaches His disciples the truth that hearers in their sinful condition have the ability to resist, misunderstand, and finally reject God’s Word. It is a call of repentance to consider the question, “what keeps you from hearing?” There are three things hindering the work of the seed sown by the sower.

First, Jesus says, “the evil one comes.” In other words, the devil acts like a bird just waiting to snatch away anything God says for your salvation. Attention spans grow weary when hearing sermons. The hardened path is having no room in the heart for what God says. It is like Pharaoh, Herod, the Pharisees or any that despises what gets in their way, dares to call them to repent, and even exchanges the truth to live a lie in the company of the Devil.

Second, Jesus says your flesh is weak. This rocky ground cannot grasp suffering. It sees the Word of God to be about making my life better, more successful, or more glorious. A spiritual high can be a letdown when we cannot see the good only bad, even if the good comes from God’s Word it feels bad. Any sign of misfortune or hardship simply leads to the result, “immediately he/she falls away.” Reason rules over the Scripture. Emotions trump what God says. All of it is a search for a substitute that is more convenient, practical, and satisfying for me.

Third, Jesus says the world is always at work. Many cares fall upon this present life. These can be those worries that arise one after another or the distractions we have from day to day. In addition, riches are more than money, though it can be a root of all kinds of evil, but riches are also the abundance of whatever in this life might be a blessing. All of it seems important, but the deceiving fact is it only lasts for a time. The result of these idols, these weeds is they choke, suffocate, and kill the only eternal treasure sown to save sinners.

Take note of what keeps us from hearing, what destroys faith, what turns any away from the Word. It is the devil, our flesh, and the world. Hearing God’s Word is impossible as if we can choose by efforts, will, or strength to be good soil for the seed. Rather, the promise rests in God’s Word being a potent seed of me and all people. The Lord proclaims, “…so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” His purpose is to speak Law and Gospel, to bring forth repentance and faith, to save us by grace alone, which means what He says is the pure gift He gives.

The gift is always the same, to hear what God said to us in good news by baptism and receive it all our days as a promise in His Word and Sacrament. This is the gracious life to be around Jesus. His disciples stood apart from the crowds not because they were any less of sinners, maybe at times even more! Yet, Jesus told them, “But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Matthew 13:16-17). Being around the Word made flesh is how God makes good soil with ears to hear and fruit that lasts in His Name.

By his death and resurrection, Jesus has defeated the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. What the devil seeks to sweep away, God has raised up the truth for all to see in His Son. Jesus did not have a hard heart, but poured it out in love on the cross so none need be apart from His sacrifice. As St. Paul tells the baptized, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

Likewise, Jesus flesh was without sin. Where we fail, He was completely faithful to the law. His way of suffering was a joy set before Him to stand in our place. It was to endure shame, guilt, and damnation at the hand of sinners to save sinners. To sweat drops of blood and drink the cup of wrath rather than seek what was convenient or easy. His glory as the Word become flesh was the Word. This Word shined most brightly by Jesus seeing not evil, but the greatest good held up by God for us all in the cross.

Jesus knows the cares and abundance of this world. He felt hunger, but also miraculously fed many. “If you are the Son of God” choked out of Him to reveal by His death the only hope we have for life. “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25-26). Our baptism put us into this death of Christ pouring out spiritual riches that are eternal. The saints have an inheritance not of weeds that fade or deceive. It is in Him who says with His glorious life before us, “Take and eat. Take and drink. Given and shed for you.”

A sower went out to sow. It is not about targeting a certain kind of people, doubling down, or what is profitable. God’s grace is for everyone whether it falls on the path, the rocks, and the weeds. Most importantly, we must examine ourselves concerning what we keeps us from hearing? The devil, the world, and our sinful flesh always seek to get in the way. They need to be put to death, to be drowned in baptism daily, to face the better news that you truly are good soil because of God’s sacrifice and what He says. There will be fruit because forgiveness is for you and the seed of salvation does not fail. A sower still goes out to sow. His Word is in your ears by grace. It is good news from God that saves sinners. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.