



SPREADING THE SEEDS OF THE GOSPEL

Rev. Mark A. Medina

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The parables of Jesus have always been short stories for ordinary people to relate to and to understand. He uses them to direct people to see the Kingdom of God in their lives and in our lives. The parable of the sower and of the spreading of the seeds points ordinary people then and to us today to see where the Gospel is planted and how it grows.

People who tend gardens and orchards or plows the fields, knows what it means to care for the land and to see the fruits of one's labor.

There is a farmer who has several fields behind our townhouse in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania where he prepares the fields for summer crops.

I remember seeing the fields before the seeds were planted. There were several areas where large rocks dotted the landscape as well as areas of gravel mixed with dirt. The vast majority of the land was clear and ready for receiving the soy beans.

The ground is prepared and then planted with soybeans; fertilizer is spread and at some point there is herbicide. As I watched the progress of the growth, the vast majority of crop is tall and deep green over the fields and heavy with soybean pods. While in other smaller areas the crop was stunted and faded, and in a few areas there were no plants at all due to the rocks.

Like a farmer and the land one readies and plants, so is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He is the Good News of God's love.

The gospel lesson for today is the guiding example of how the ministry of Christ spread throughout the Mediterranean region. The disciples were the first to receive the Christian message and from there the Gospel begins to spread throughout the world and even into Green Valley.

During his time with the people, the Risen Lord had a way of helping ordinary people feel like they fit into God's gracious plan. The Lord knew the depth of the human condition then, as well as now, and sought to spread the goodness of God's wholesome word. With love and grace, God planted Jesus in the world.

The parables Jesus used were just small pieces of God's larger picture of faith. This use of a farmer or sower gives us a glimmer of the Creator's greater story of life.

The parable begins with Jesus teaching to a large crowd about how ⁵**"a sower went out to sow his seed;** thus the stage is set for the word of God to be received into a person's life, into our lives.

The Lord gives us the purpose of the parable and what it means for us today as the word of God. He said ¹⁸**"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.** There is a sense of carelessness about one's faith when one hears the Gospel and it falls on hardened hearts. There is a lack of openness and understanding upon hearing the word of God.

Next ²⁰**The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.** When the word was spread, there was some growth but not enough to sustain the person through threats of life. They fell away or backed away from the world. The depth of the Gospel started to grow but lacked commitment on the part of the person.

²²**The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.** The sower spreads the word among the toughness of life and it is not allowed to grow because of worldly cares. There is a hindrance of faith because the world has a strong grasp on one's life. Some listen but without a totally receptive heart. The person falls away. There is no long term commitment to God living in them.

Finally, ²³**...the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."**

The sower spreads the word of God and found the soil open to growth. This same growth is open to those who truly respond to Jesus calling us to faith. Jesus said, **"⁹Whoever has ears, let them hear."** When we hear, we respond.

Friends, the Lord calls each of us to listen and to become a presence of love and grace in our life. We become an active participant in God's bigger story of salvation. Yes, the Almighty has given us the opportunity to take the story to the world. You and I have a place in God's larger picture story of unconditional love. We also have to intentionally and honestly seek God's heart so we live in the realm of the Creator's greater glory and spirit.

Jesus said of those who are continually growing in their faith ¹⁰**"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God.."** Continually growing and to give thank and to share that Good News with all people.

Jesus' message fell on a variety of souls and we are the recipients of God's word. It is then up to each of us to grow our faith even in times of struggle and evil. Christ is going to be there for us and live with us.

This parable is most helpful for God's word to be planted and celebrated. Jesus sowed the seeds of his Gospel everywhere he went – telling stories, healing hurting people, preaching the love of God, and admonishing his detractors. Most importantly, he was trying to grow the disciples from a group of immature and bickering people into the leaders who would continue his ministry into the world and plant churches.

The Apostle Paul went throughout the Mediterranean region spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ. He was church planting and establishing the Christian church where the people learned about the Lord. The letters he wrote to the Christian churches always reflected the life and love of the Savior.

So this passage from Romans chapter 8 verses 1 thru 11 lifts up the work of the Spirit in Christ Jesus. Paul reminds the Christians in Rome and here at Valley Presbyterian Church of their relationship and our relationship with the Lord especially when the flesh and the Spirit are at odds.

Paul writes of the deep faith in Jesus as one lives through the struggles of flesh and Spirit. He said ...**“there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

He is showing us how the Spirit is alive in us and fights against the flesh of the world. This battle between the Spirit of Christ and the desire of the flesh are real and we need to decide which side we want to accept. I like some of the words in the anthem today: “I choose you to be My beloved, I choose you to be My joy, I choose you to live with Me forever, I choose you, I choose you.” What wonderful words to hear because Paul is asking us to be in the Spirit of Christ.

He is reminding Christians to live in the Spirit of Christ and to be constantly centered on him. Because, my friends, the world is tearing us apart.

Paul writes ⁵ **those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.**

So the pull of the flesh is great and Paul wants the Christian to live in Christ. When we do, we also experience the Spirit of God that lives in us. ⁹ **You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.** That is pretty radical. But at the same time it is true.

¹⁰ **But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if**

the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. God is in us. And when our minds are centered on God and Christ we can feel that sense of life and we are able to live in this world and we are able to share that goodness with all people.

We have a choice. We can either follow the ways of the world or following Christ.

My dear sisters and brothers, Christ is planting himself squarely into our life and faith. He is the reason we are here in this place to worship and to praise his glory. He is the only one who gives us the Christian growth that we need and desire. We are alive in the Spirit of him as we learn from him the Good News that he proclaims. The Good News of salvation. The Good News of love.

Truly, each of us must honestly ask ourselves, Am I living in the Spirit of Christ or is my life full of the cares of the world? Am I showing the love of God in my everyday actions and words or Am I seeking to get my own way and not care about others?

Friends, may we seek the seeds of the Gospel so our lives can be productive and loving. Growth comes from a lot of love, grace and peace. Paul writes to us, **10.....if Christ is in you,..the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.** Remember who is alive in our lives everyday so that we have the Spirit of Christ influencing our minds and guiding our actions. So may we live in the Spirit of Christ this day and every day in the future.

Let us pray: Thank you God for your Son Jesus who you sent to love and save us. The unconditionally love you give us is a free gift of grace. May you give us the mind that can distinguish between the things of this world and the Spirit of Christ. For he is the one who gives us the word of love and salvation. This we pray in the name Jesus who is our Lord and Savior. Amen and amen.

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Scriptural Support:

Romans 8:1-11 NIV

¹Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you^[a] free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh,^[b] God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.^[c] And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life^[d] because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of^[e] his Spirit who lives in you.

Matthew 13:1-9 18-23 NIV

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake.² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”