

Scripture:

Matthew 13: 1-23

“What type of soil are you?”

Today in Matthew’s gospel we have another fine example of Jesus using a parable --- a story that teaches ---- to guide and instruct people in His ways - ---- including His disciples.

And if we look closely at the text today we see that the parable was for everyone.

Picking it up at verse 1 --- “That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables saying...” ---- clearly the parable of the four soils is for all to hear ----- great crowds gathered to listen ---- indeed so great a crowd that Jesus saw it prudent to get into a boat and cast off shore so that all would be able to hear Him as he spoke.

And then skipping ahead to verse 10 ----- “The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables/” --- and then skipping ahead again to verse 18 ---- “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means...” ----- clearly the explanation of the parable is only for the ears of His disciples --- and not also the large crowds.

The parable then is for the whole of the gathered crowd ----- and its explanation ----- is for His disciples only.

Part of what this tells us is that what Jesus shares today applies to all ----- seekers --- believers ---- disciples and tag alongers in the large crowds.

There’s something for everyone in our passage today ---- something for those who may just have gone along with the crowd not knowing who it was they were following ----- as well as Jesus’ most committed followers --- His Disciples.

Often in scripture ---- the message of the passage has far more do with God - --- and His loving ---- saving --- compassionate nature --- and far less to do with us as children of God.

And our passage for today certainly has an element of this as well.

Because ----- as we see --- the seeds --- which represent the gift of the gospel ----- are scattered freely --- and abundantly ----- demonstrating God's abundant overflowing grace.

God doesn't calculate where the best places to throw the seeds might be --- and then save the seeds for these places only --- as a shrewd farmer might.

Instead God in His abundant grace and mercy --- not only scatters ---- but throws the seeds everywhere ---- beaten down pathways --- rocky soil --- soil that already has things growing in it --- and then of course rich top soil as well.

First century farmers ---- on first hearing this parable ---- likely thought that the one throwing the seeds was a poor example of a farmer.

After all who would throw seeds all over the place on pathways --- among the rocks --- amidst pre-existing growth --- a good farmer would be much more shrewd and calculative and save the seeds only for the soil that had half a chance of producing crops.

But of course God is different ----- He throws the seeds everywhere ---- demonstrating His abundant grace ---- His generous mercy --- and His overflowing love.

So yes --- this parable ----- shows us much about the nature of God --- His abundant ----- generous --- overflowing --- grace mercy and love.

But this passage also has a whole lot to do with us.

With our hearts --- our dispositions ---- our concerns --- what we choose to spend our time --- energy --- and focus on.

It would have been all too easy for the disciples to think that the parable was a teaching tool only for the large crowds that gathered --- and not also themselves.

It would have been all too easy for the disciples to concern themselves with the crowds --- with the ones hearing the message --- without also stopping to consider how the message might apply to them as well.

Jesus ---- wanting to ensure that the disciples hear the message for themselves and apply the message to them selves ----- basically says to the disciples ---- in verses 10 to 17 ----- listen up because this message is also for you.

Verse 11 ----- “He --- Jesus replied ----- “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you...”

And then verse 16 --- “But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.”

And then verse 18 ---- “Listen to what the parable of the sower means...”

The people ----- the large crowds --- have an accountability as to what kind of soil they are.

And so do the disciples.

This passage spoke ----- to each and every person that was there that day.

And this passage speaks to each and every one of us here today.

It reminds us that we all have a responsibility ---- and an accountability ---- as to what kind of soil we cultivate in our hearts and in our lives --- as to how we interact with the gift of the gospel.

God is forever sowing the seeds ----- the gifts of the gospel --- before us --- and in us ---- and through us.

And we have a responsibility ----- we make choices ----- daily --- as to what kind of soil we are --- as to what kind of environment we cultivate to recognize the gospel or not ---- to receive the gospel or not --- to grow the gospel or not ---- for the gospel to take root in our hearts or not --- and so on.

We choose ---- by our actions --- by what we read --- by what we watch -----
 - whether or not the precious gift of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ has
 any chance of taking root and growing in our hearts and in our lives.

We choose --- whether or not the gospel will take deep strong root in our
 lives --- or if it will only ever only grow shallow ---- by many of the choices
 we make and focus we choose.

Yes ---- God is there forever and abundantly --- generously ----- throwing
 the seeds of the good news of Jesus Christ all about us --- and He always
 will be ----- but we also choose how we will interact with Him.

And according to the gospel today ---- we choose between 4 kinds of soil ---
 4 kinds of reactions.

First there is the soil that is like a pathway ----- hard and packed down ---
 so hard and calloused ----- that there is very little chance of anything ever
 taking root there.

This is the soil that when the seeds are thrown ----- they bounce off and the
 birds come and eat them up.

There is very little chance of the seed ---- the gift of the gospel taking root in
 hearts and lives with this kind of soil ----- because they are so very hard ---
 and cold ----- and closed ----- close minded ---- close hearted.

When the seed comes ----- as verses 18 and 19 say ---- it is snatched away
 because it just bounces off and isn't at all understood or given a chance to
 take root or grow.

And then there is the next kind of soil ---- the soil in the rocky places.

Soil here is thin and scarce and few and far between.

When the message of the gospel comes here it takes root --- but the root is
 weak because the soil is so thin ---- it has no chance of growing strong and
 deep.

There is no effort here to move away some of the rocks and give the seed a chance ----- no effort is put out to give the gospel a chance to actually take root and grow strong.

So when the seed is spread here it quickly takes root --- there is sudden joy - ---- as verse 20 says ----- but it lasts only a short time.

When trouble or persecution ---- when challenges come ----- the seed withers ---- the person falls away and the gift of the gospel dies off without having had the opportunity to take root.

Where the seed on the path had no chance in the first place ----- here the seed has at least a small chance ---- but because no effort is given ---- it withers away as quickly as it first grew.

And then there is the third kind of reaction ----- where the soil is actually quite good and productive ----- there is already a bit of growth there.

Unfortunately in this soil --- other cares and concerns overrule the gospel --- - the seeds of love ----- and so the thorns ---- the worries of the world --- the desire for wealth --- as verse 22 says ---- choke it out.

Here the seeds of God's love have a very good chance --- a great opportunity to take root and grow ----- the soil is pretty good ----- the problem is ----- - there are far too many other concerns that push aside the gospel way of life.

Here secondary things ----- strictly worldly things occupy far too great a place in one's heart for the good news of Jesus Christ to flourish --- despite it having a decent chance ----- poor prioritizing leads to its demise.

Demands and desires that are treated as primary ---- when in truth they will only ever be secondary at best ---- choke out the gospel taking root and changing lives.

And then finally there is the good and faithful soil --- the good and faithful disciples.

The ones who keep their hearts soft and pliable --- open to change and newness of life.

The ones who clear away the stones that hinder their growth in Christ.

The ones who cut away the ---- thorns and weeds --- and secondary things in life --- and are ready to receive the gifts of God as He so shares and reveals them.

These are the people that are truly open and receptive to God's saving love and grace and mercy in Jesus Christ.

These are the ones who ----- as our final verse says --- produce a crop yielding a hundred ---- sixty --- or thirty what was first sown.

These are the good and faithful ones who are diligent --- and disciplined -----
- who make an effort --- who pay attention to what they read ----- and what they watch --- the ones who are careful of what they say and the words they choose ----- the ones who carefully choose who they spend time with --- and how they use their --- time --- energy and resources.

These are the ones who make sure that nothing hinders --- or harms ----- the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in their lives and in their hearts.

We all have a choice ----- we all have choices to make.

We can choose to have hard hearts ----- soil that is packed hard like a pathway in a garden ----- so hard --- and so tight --- and so closed off ----- that nothing new can ever take root there.

Or ---- we can choose to have rocky soil ---- a rocky relationship with the gospel.

We can have dispositions that ---- yes are pretty open and attentive most of the time ----- but because of burdens --- and hindrances ----- things we leave unaddressed ---- and never tend to ----- the gospel never really has any chance to take lasting root.

Or ----- we can choose to have good soil ---- good intentions ----- but poorly tended good soil --- poor follow through and prioritizing.

It's all too easy to have far too many other concerns --- goals --- and desires in our lives such that the gospel just gets pushed aside and eventually choked out by other --- secondary things --- things like worries and the desire for wealth ---- and other strictly worldly stuff.

Or ----- we can choose to have good and well attended to soil --- be the very best that we can be in Christ.

Where we refuse to let anything else choke out --- or suck the good nutrients away from God's will and way in our lives.

The seeds are always there.

God's providing ----- loving ---- saving ---- presence and hands ----- are forever there ---- here ----- reaching out with seeds of love and grace and mercy --- nourishment --- beauty and life ----- eternal life.

The choice is ours whether we want to be hard and careless --- "kind of" --- "sort of" ----- engaged --- but too short on time or concern ---- not focused or engaged fully in Christ.

The choice is ours.

We can blame our surroundings ---- blame our lives ----- our circumstances - ---- blame whatever.

But in the end ----- it is we that choose what kind of soil we will be --- what kind of hearts we cultivate ----- what kind of lives we live.

One's that are open to ----- attending on --- just waiting and anticipating --- ----- gifts from God so that we can grow and nurture and attend to them.

Or one's that are sloppy --- careless --- closed off --- too busy ---- caught up in secondary concerns to a fault.

We have to be diligent ----- and almost militant about the state of our souls -- --- God takes it very seriously --- as serious as Christ crucified ---- so ought we take it seriously.

So ----- what type of soil are you?

We're all a bit of all 4 truthfully.

How do you interact --- with the saving ----- reconciling --- redeeming ----
love of Christ.

Only you and God truly know --- you decide.

You can be good soil ----- attending to God's mercies.

Or you can be poor soil ----- concerned with other things --- too busy ----
whatever.

Either way ----- God is there ----- God is here ----- sowing the seeds of love
and compassion --- and salvation.

It's up to us to be open ---- and attentive.

It's up to us to take time to be Holy ---- and tend to the soil of our hearts.

It's serious stuff ----- as serious as the cross Christ was crucified on.

Amen.