

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – 2020

“Managing the Soil”

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

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Farming, whether you do it in your backyard or in a clay pot, really comes down to one thing, doesn't it? Managing your soil, right? Clearing the rocks, pulling the weeds, fertilizing the plants, and providing just the right amount of water throughout the summer months.

As we consider our Lord's parable today, let us ask ourselves this question, *“How are we managing our soil?”*

If asked the question, *“Who are the arch enemies of the church?”* Most Lutherans can give the answer in their sleep – Satan, the world, and our own sinful flesh, and not necessarily in that order. Or as Jesus so succinctly puts it to us in a parable – your enemies in farming are the birds, the rocks, and the weeds!

Let's look at Enemy #1, the devil. Jesus says, “When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.” Now I don't believe Jesus is saying that the Bible is so complex that some people are simply not able to understand it. Even a young child can understand the simplicity of the gospel, which basically announces to the whole world, that you have messed up, but God has a grand solution to make payment for your mess ups in life, or as Jesus said, “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but rather to save the world through him” (John 3:16,17). I don't think that's a hard message to understand, so why does Jesus say some don't understand it?

I believe there are two contributing factors to this end: 1) Sometimes it's the clergy who get in the way of the message. Guess what, if you don't preach the gospel from the pulpit, the likelihood of your people understanding the gospel isn't really good! If ministers, and I don't care what church body you're in, or came out of... , if they confuse the message, the sheep are going to suffer! Pray for your pastors, that they might boldly and courageously feed you with the Word of God and a right understanding of his message! They are weak no different than we are weak! As St. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14). Maybe the clergy know the gospel like the back of their hand, but do not know its right relationship between the law and the gospel and so they butcher its message and leave its people in despair because there are nothing but rules being heard from the pulpit as though the pastor were a 2nd police officer for your life!

The clergy, of course, are not the only problem..., and God is not going to let anyone say on Judgment Day, “The reason I didn't understand the gospel was because pastor so and so didn't preach it to me!” No, we will all stand before the Living Lord Jesus Christ to give account of what we believe and did not believe. So, the second reason people don't understand the gospel is plainly because the sheep are too lazy to listen to it! Or they think that they know it all already, so they don't need to go to church regularly, they don't need to meditate on God's Word daily, they don't need family devotions, they don't need to hear anything beyond their confirmation years! Well, as the void of God's Word in one's life creates a vacuum in their soul, the birds of the air come and fill that vacuum with all sorts of deceitful doctrines and teachings that conflict with the gospel of our Lord. And when that happens – look out! For unbelief waits right around the corner for such souls.

Enemy #2 that gets in the way of soil management: rocks in the soil. I'd like to look at this analogy that Jesus uses from a slightly different angle rather than farming. Those of you with rock beds around your home for landscaping purposes, even if you put a nice weed blocker underneath the surface of those rocks, know that little blades of grass still tend to pop up through the rocks. This is probably too much information, but after my wife goes for a run in the morning, her routine to stretch out her ham strings after a run, is to pull up those little grass blades that pop up in our flour bed near our house. And I've helped her on occasion, and what's amazing about these little blades of grass that pop through the rocks is how easy they come out of the ground, because they really don't have good soil to be rooted into the ground – they are growing through rocks!

A faith that is shallow, and not being managed daily with God's Word, that is the sword of the Spirit, is a faith that is much more in danger of being plucked out due to lack of soil management. You've seen this in others, right, maybe even those in your family. But ask yourself the really hard question today – have you seen it in your own life? I have in my own! The great apostle talked about his daily struggle with sin and temptation, and how he burned with these inward desires no different than any other human being! Our flesh is a tremendous enemy that stands against us.

Enemy #3 - the weeds which represent worries and cares of the world. Worry is probably the most under rated sin that confronts the church, and I think it's because we normalize worry and sort of act as if it's OK. But it's not OK to worry about your health, about the climate of this world, about the economy, about your bank account, about your children, about your marriage! He wants you to "Cast all your anxieties upon him, because he cares for you," but when we don't, we bottle those worries up, and become consumed by them, no different than a weed wraps itself around a good crop and chokes it of all vitality and life!

Can you hear Jesus' earnest plea for us in this parable to ground ourselves in God's Word lest these bad things happen to us? This is why he told the parable to us because he loves us! That's why he says, "He who has ears, let him hear." Jesus is inviting his church to hear the beautiful message of the gospel and be grounded in its message so that we don't mismanage our soil and fall into harm's way in this life.

Jesus knows better than any of us, just how fragile we are in this life, and just how vicious our enemies are that stand up against us – the birds, the rocks, and the weeds! Jesus ought to know, because he came into this world to endure temptation on our behalf and experience the dread attacks of the devil. And though he didn't give in to sin even once, you can bet that he felt and experienced that severity of the devil's attacks no different than you and I contend with every day! He overcame the devil – for you and me.

You see, the good news, dear friends, is that Jesus has become sin in your and my place, so that every time in this life we have mis-managed our soil, and only God knows how often we have done that! But each time we've fallen into harms way, Jesus has forgiven us our sins, and has reconciled us with his Father in heaven. How did he do it? You know how he did it, but it's worth saying from this pulpit each and every week, which is why our pastors might sound like broken records once in a while saying the same thing week after week! Jesus did it, he paid for all of our sin, by becoming sin for us, and dying upon a tree to atone for our sins before his heavenly Father, so that we might be forgiven. In addition to that, Jesus exchanged his righteousness for our sins, so that through faith in Jesus Christ, we are everything that God has required of us in this life – we fully measure up now, to God's righteous decrees.

Do you need righteousness? No more than I do! You have it in Christ! That's why Jesus is commanding us today, "To Hear with our ears," the precious message of God's love, because he doesn't want us to forfeit what he freely gave to us, namely the gift of salvation. So, go now, manage your soil with the gospel in your homes, at our church, and in your social life with your friends and co-workers. Tell them all, what great things God has done for you! Amen.