

July 13, 2014

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

From "The Message", a contemporary Bible translation :

"When anyone hears news of the Kingdom and doesn't take it in, it just remains on the surface, and so the Evil One comes along and plucks it right out of that man's heart." *Amen.*

I wonder what those crowds gathered by the sea that day thought when they heard Jesus speak.

Just imagine yourselves in their place. You'd heard stories about this country preacher who was travelling around teaching and performing various miracles. You'd heard some amazing stories about what he had done.

Some said there was no way those stories could be true. Some yokel from Gallilee, claiming to be the long promised Messiah, who would restore the glory to Israel and bring about God's kingdom on Earth?

Come on... It had to be crazy talk..sounds as if either the guy has spent too much time in the pub or he is suffering from some form of mental problem !

They'd seen a hundred madmen claiming to be the Messiah and not one of them had been the real deal....what a load of old rot !

But then others were convinced this man, Jesus, was for real. They'd seen the Rabbi at work, or they knew people who had heard him teach and preach....and this Jesus would be near their village in the morning.

Can you imagine the expectation and anticipation?

Can you imagine the scene on the shore that day? Can you feel the press of bodies one against the other? Can you hear the chatter and the talk? The Scripture says the crowds were so large that Jesus had to get in a boat and push out into the water so they could all see him.

And then our Lord said this: "A farmer in his field sows his seed. He throws it everywhere. Some falls on the path and is eaten by birds. Some falls on the rocky ground and grows at first, but it is killed by the hot sun. Some falls in among the weeds and thorns and is choked to death. But some falls on good soil and yields a rich bounty."

And that's it..... That is all he says.....what a letdown....

When **we** read the Scripture, we get an explanation of the parable, but the crowd there on the sea shore that day, they didn't. They just got the story.....what use was that ?

I think it was a pretty good thing the disciples didn't sell tickets to see Jesus. They would have had a lot of demands for refunds.

The points that Jesus was making of course apply to us all here this morning. I can guarantee not everyone who heard the gospel a few minutes ago will bear fruit. Some of us here are distracted and are thinking more about the fruit they have to buy from the market for the kids' party later today.

Some of us heard the words, but it didn't get past our ears. The words certainly do not touch our hearts or minds in any way... and even if the words are remembered , they will probably fade away by lunchtime.

One hopes, at least, that some of us heard and rejoice when we heard Jesus' words. But later when the inevitable turmoil and trouble arise in our lives, the joy fades. The good news dies.

Some of us certainly heard the good news, but our hearts are set on wealth or the pleasures of the world, and these material things strangle whatever change the good news might bring to our lives.

Then there is the opposite situation, some of us burdened by financial problems, hear the good news and just wish it applied to us but of course it never will....how could it?

And then....at last... some of us hear the good news from Matthew's Gospel, and it bursts forth in our lives. Christ's meaning will help us find new life and new meaning in the world. We will have the opportunity to live as new and different people.

Today's Gospel read in this loving community will bring God's love to the world in what we do and how we live, and how we spread the word to our neighbors outside this place..

By the way he preached, Jesus was saying, "Look, not all of you are going to get something from this. I'm okay with that."

I think it was Bishop Bill Wiedrich who said that we preachers need to always take our lead from Jesus. Too often, we "occupiers of the pulpit" feel that we have to make the Gospel easy to understand and easy to digest. We file off the rough edges and explain away the parts that are hard.

When Jesus says to people that no one can follow him if they don't hate their father and mother, we get edgy. When He says it is harder for a rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to get through the eye of a needle, we start looking for other texts to preach that Sunday. When he says pray for our enemies, we feel a bad cold or back pain coming on and we get out our list of substitute speakers who can be in the pulpit that week !

Bishop Wiedrich says that the real truth of the matter is that the good news of the kingdom of God is so hard for ordinary sinners like you and me to understand that it takes a miracle for us to really hear it.

It is only by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit that we hear the good news as good news.

In the parable, the sower – that is Jesus – scatters the seed everywhere. It is flying all over the place. He doesn't care. The birds and squirrels will eat a bunch of it. The sun is going to kill a lot of it. The weeds will choke a bunch more. But he keeps throwing it out there.

God has an unlimited supply of seed to spread around, we live our lives and run our churches not out of fear that we will run out of resources, but out of confidence that some of the seed will find good soil.

A lot of what we do will not work. Many of our ministry ideas and efforts will fail. But if we keep throwing God's good seed out there, some of it will find soil ready to receive it. We just have to keep on trying.

What I hear in the parable today is Jesus saying that he understands our spiritual journey and our spiritual struggles.

He understands that for some of us, we find ourselves in places where the world's troubles blast away all our joy in God.

He understands that some of us are too taken up with worldly concerns. The weeds of this world suck the life out of our faith.

He understands that some of us can barely hear the words of hope or do not believe them to be true. We are like the hard, dry ground on the foot path that has been beaten down to the point that the word of truth cannot penetrate.

The good news is this: Jesus will keep throwing seed our way until we are ready and able to receive it.

He will keep speaking to us through the lives of his faithful people. He will keep speaking to us in our prayers. He will show us the grace of God in the face of a child given a warm meal or the blessing of education. He will churn up the tough,

rocky soil of our souls with his gospel of the Father's love. He will water our parched ground with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes, he'll do this in the most unexpected, unlikely ways.

I will always remember Dora Everett, a very prim and proper friend of my mom back in our home village of Llandaff, Wales. To our knowledge, Dora never missed church on a Sunday morning but word had it she was also known to pop down to the pub of an evening.

One Sunday Dora was noticeably missing from her normal seat at church.

It appears that the previous evening Dora had locked herself out of her house and so, on returning from the pub, was climbing in through a window.

Now, the window was not quite big enough for her girth to fit through and she wound up hanging halfway through it, stuck between the wall and her bed, her legs hanging out of the window.

After "a long time" in that position, Dora got pretty upset. So, she made this promise to God, which we heard she confided to her daughter. "God, if you get me out of this, I promise to go back to church next Sunday."

Dora was in church the next and every Sunday thereafter, and to my knowledge never a word was spoken of that unseemly night's debacle.....but the thought of Dora's rather plump legs hanging out of the window...is enough to turn me back to drink.

Now, I'm sure God was working in her life in lots of ways to get her to the point where she would make such a bargain and keep it. And she did keep it. We never heard how she got through the window, but rumor has it that someone did hear the local fire brigade about three o'clock in the morning.

The good news is that God is working in all of our lives. He's working in the lives of our friends and family and neighbors. He is very busy here at Trinity; he was busy extracting my mom's friend Dora from that window.

God is working to break up the hard soil of our souls and make them ready to receive his word of hope and faith and love.

We are invited to sow God's seed into the lives of everyone and to sow God's seed everywhere we go.

We are invited to build the community of Christ.

....Amen

