

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

Sermon: “The See of Life”

We find ourselves in the opening weeks of the Pentecost season, which leads the Church into growth toward spiritual maturity and fruitful Christian living, especially evident in this Sunday’s Gospel. Following the great events of the paschal cycle, the seed once buried in the dark earth, Christ (John 12:24), was raised and became the firstfruits of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:23). The Church’s life of faith, love, and witness germinates, grows, and multiplies from Christ and his victory over death. Thus, in this week’s Collect we pray that God’s Word would accomplish this in us as we *“read, and inwardly digest”* the Scriptures sown in our hearts.

The Word as seed is explicit in the Old Testament Reading, including the assurance that *“it shall not return to me empty”* (Isaiah 55:11).

In 1862 a German Lutheran missionary by named Ingwer Ludwig Nommensen was dispatched by the Rhenish Mission Society in Barmen, Germany, to Sumatra (Indonesia).

He faithfully sowed the seed of the Gospel among the Batak tribes in Sumatra for many decades, in the face of all kinds of opposition and rejection. It was three years before there was any discernable result from his missionary preaching, in the form of a Baptism, and then even more years before much further progress was made in converting the local Batak people.

His work was at various points hampered by local political problems with the Batak king and other tribal chiefs who were waging war on the local Dutch occupiers. Yet he was sustained and encouraged in his work, continuing in the face of difficulty over the many remaining years of his life until his death at the age of 84 in 1918.

In 1878, after many years of difficult labor, he completed his first translation of the New Testament into the Batak language, enabling people to read the Scriptures themselves. At the time of his death, there were 180,000 Batak Lutherans who were the direct fruit of this one Christian missionary preaching, teaching, and translating over almost fifty years.

The Batak Lutheran Church today is a vital and thriving Asian Lutheran church, from which many postgraduate students have come to study at Australian Lutheran College in Adelaide, Australia. The seed produces grain, some hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty (Mt 13:8).

“What kind of soil is your life?” this parable might make us ask ourselves. The story after all spends a lot of time on the soil: bad soil, choked with stones and thorns, where the seed really goes nowhere and changes nothing, but then also good soil, where the seed of God’s Word can put down roots, grow and mature, and bear fruit.

What is happening with the seed of God’s Word in your life? When you listen to the Sunday sermon or read the Bible, is it sinking in? Are you truly listening to God and understanding what he is saying to you so that your life is bearing fruit? We know the answer isn’t always what it should be—maybe even at this very moment! But there’s comfort in our text: Even though our sinful hearts are often unready to believe Christ’s Word and bear its good fruit, Christ never stops sowing His Gospel upon us, knowing it will miraculously bear fruit. He’ll keep on doing that for us this morning.

Maybe, like me, you all too readily recognize the bad soil profiles Jesus describes in this parable, from your own daily life: The hard, trodden-down “path”—where the seed sown just bounces off and scatters. Jesus says this is what happens when we do not understand God’s Word. We just don’t get it. We hear the Gospel of grace, but it makes little impression.

Then there is “stony ground” reception of the Word. We hear it; germination happens; we understand and grasp the Gospel message of forgiveness. It may indeed bring us joy for a time. But it does not take root deeply. It does not truly shape our hearts or consciences, nor change our priorities or underlying values. When our faith meets a challenge or life gets difficult, its shallow roots dry up and wither, and we turn to different solutions.

Then there is “thorn-infested” soil. We may hear and understand what God says to us. It may take root in some way in us, perhaps even deeply. But the competition for that soil space is too strong. Our worries about this life, our property, goods, earthly security all crowd in and the Word is choked out, fruitless once again.

Jesus' words in this part of the parable are very telling; they tell us of our own spiritual aridness. They show us our spiritual hardness and slowness to hear. Let us not fool ourselves. A lot of the time, we are stony and thorn-infested ground.

But although Jesus talks a lot about the soil in this parable, we do well to realize that it is often the way with his parables that the main point, the true center of the story, is not what first takes our attention. Let us take a closer look at the Sower and his work. He seems knowingly to throw most of his seed, precious as it is, into the arid corners of the field, and only perhaps a quarter into the soil that will receive it well. He holds back nothing but spreads his seed generously.

People do indeed ignore the message of the Gospel. You know how so many today reject it. Even we, his own people, are inconsistent and unfruitful hearers of it. But Christ died for all, including all who reject him. All the sins of the whole world have been forgiven; heaven is open to all. Therefore, the Sower still sows his Gospel of salvation and goes on sowing it in the soil of his Church and this world, good and bad.

The miracle is that, despite all the stones and thorns and hardness of human hearts, some of this seed still lands in good soil and grows—and not sparsely, but thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.

Yes, even in you and me with our rocky, weed-infested hearts. The Sower well knows where his seed lands; he knows you. On the day of your Baptism into Jesus' death, he, the Sower, in his grace and mercy, sowed seed down into your heart that has grown and produced faith and love in you. And day by day, Sunday by Sunday, the same life-giving seed is sown in our lives, through his Word and Sacrament—that word of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus, that Gospel seed that even changes rocky soil and softens hard hearts.

If you doubt this, then just pay attention to what is happening as this very sermon is preached to you, indeed as the absolution is pronounced to you, as you receive the Holy Supper! The Sower is sowing his seed in you and in us all. Look around you, at your Christian neighbors and friends. The Church, for all its soil problems, is the living, fruit-bearing work of Christ and his Word by the power of the Holy Spirit.

See the Word of God being sown all around our church, in our communities, in the world, producing its increase.

Welcome and hear the Word. ***“He who has ears, let him hear”*** (v 9). Receive the Gospel gladly. Believe in your forgiveness through the cross of Christ, and believe in the Word’s work in your life. The seed will grow in you.

Trust the Word. Even when it seems to fail, it will still produce God’s harvest. It is doing its work. The Sower knows his work. God is doing things you do not know about, even through your life and the lives of others, to bring fruit.

Speak the Word. Jesus explained his parable to his disciples, just as he has explained it to us today. This was so that we could speak the Word clearly to others. This is great assurance and encouragement for preachers like me, but also for all Christians who speak the Gospel to others in their vocations as parents, friends, workers, and citizens.

Amen