

# The Sower

Preached on Sexagesima Sunday  
Trinity Anglican Church, WRJ  
Feb. 20, 2022  
Text: Luke 8: 4-15

Today we observe Sexagesima Sunday, the second Sunday before Lent, which comes from the Latin word for “sixty,” referring to the approximate number of days before Easter. Last week was Septuagesima (seventy), next week will be Quinquagesima (fifty), and Lent itself is called in Latin Quadragesima (forty). These three Sundays of what our Prayer Book calls the “Pre-Lenten Season” serve as a way for us to prepare, spiritually and physically, for our upcoming season of fasting, repentance, and prayer. Our Sunday readings for these three weeks, especially the Gospels, are supposed to help us get into this Lenten mindset. Last week we had the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard from the Twentieth Chapter of St. Matthew. We were reminded that many are called but few are chosen, a concept that we should find to be sobering, driving us to repentance. But we were also reminded that everyone received the same wages. That is, it’s never too late to repent.

Today’s Gospel is another familiar yet sobering parable, the Parable of the Sower, from St. Luke 8, beginning at verse 4:

*And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.” And as he said these things, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

You may recall that our Gospel from two weeks ago was the similar Parable of the Wheat and Tares from Matthew 13. St. Augustine and several other church fathers always liked to discuss these two parables together for two reasons. First, St. Matthew tells these parables together; his version of the Parable of the Sower is earlier in Chapter 13. Second, the two parables deal with the same basic issue: some folks receive the Word of God, but it bears no fruit. Two weeks ago, we talked about how a sign of being wheat rather than a tare is the fact that, like the disciples, we follow Jesus to have him explain the parable. This is our first lesson as we prepare for Lent: we need to listen to Jesus. We need to seek him out. We need to go to him, humbly asking him to explain the Gospel. And where do we find Jesus? In the Word and in the Sacrament. In Scripture we find his teachings and everything necessary for salvation. In the Sacrament, we commune with Christ and are joined to him and his Body. In this way, we are enabled to hear Jesus’s explanation.

*Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.*

The word of God is spread far and wide. The call goes out to everyone. The message is this: We have a sin problem. Our only escape from its consequences is repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins so that we are forgiven, reconciled to God, given eternal life, and made children of God to spend eternity with Him in heaven.

Everything we do in our Liturgy points us back to this Gospel message. Sometimes we get so familiar with these things that we forget the wonder of it all. Lent is a good time for spiritual rejuvenation, a good time to repent of becoming dull in our affection for the Gospel. If someone has never really considered the Gospel message, just gone through the religious motions, Lent is a good time for that person to wake up!

Jesus gives three examples in the parable of ways that the Gospel can be missed, three states of soil that bear no fruit. First, we have the “ones along the path.” In this case, the word of God never penetrates the heart to begin with. The word is not really heard. One may encounter the vocalization, but not take it in. This is because deafness to the Gospel is a spiritual problem, first and foremost. We are not neutral recording machines. Hence, we cannot hear what our rebellious hearts won’t acknowledge. Jesus realizes this and says many times in the New Testament: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Furthermore, Satan does not want people to hear the Gospel, and he will do everything he can to keep folks dead in their sins. The lies of the Enemy are legion, from false gods to the multitude of insane things our culture says we must have. In all these, the Old Serpent intones the same line that ensnared our first parents: “Did God really say?”

Then there are the seeds that land on the rock. These represent those who believe with a shallow faith. Testing, temptation, and suffering wither away any fruits of the Gospel, just as the hot sun withers anything planted in dry soil where roots cannot be established. If biblical faith is trusting in God, a shallow, stony faith is trusting in our flesh, especially the comforts that the flesh desires. But the Gospel calls us to renounce the lusts and sinful desires of the flesh, lest they keep the Word of God from taking root in our hearts.

Third, we have that which “fell among the thorns.” Jesus said that these hear but are “choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life,” which leads to an immature faith. Our baptismal vows call this the “vain pomp and glory of the world,” in which we allow

the circumstances of this present life to choke out any concerns for the life to come. Life certainly has cares that must be addressed. Money is something we all deal with, and riches can certainly be a blessing. Life certainly has pleasures, many of which are good, as God says in Genesis 1. But we cannot make these things our top priority. Jesus told us “seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things would be added unto you (Matthew 6:33). The Kingdom of God is to be our priority; we let the world take care of itself, even as we do our proper duties as people who walk rightly.

To sum up, we cannot be led by the World, the Flesh, and the Devil if we want the Gospel to bear any fruit in our lives. We cannot serve them if we want to follow Christ. What do we do if we search our hearts and find that they are hard, or stony, or thorny? Well, St. John Chrysostom tells us to plow the bad soil! He writes:

*There is such a thing as the rock changing, and becoming rich land; and the wayside being no longer trampled on, nor lying open to all that pass by, but that it may be a fertile field; and the thorns may be destroyed, and the seed enjoy full security. For had it been impossible, this Sower would not have sown.*

This is why our liturgy always proclaims either the Summary of the Law or the 10 Commandments. This is why we have a call to repentance along with a General Confession and Absolution every service. This is why we include so much Scripture in both the Daily Offices and Holy Communion. The Church is putting the plow to our hearts, that the stones may be turned, the path broken up, and the thorns burned, in whatever way such things manifest in our lives. Remember the lesson from last week: it is never too late to repent and turn to God.

How about that fourth soil? The Good Soil? Jesus says that they, “hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.” For the Gospel to bear fruit, we must hold it fast. We must let it grow. We must be patient and humble, coming before God, that he might work the soil. We must be patient as the Lord Jesus Christ works in us, molding us little by little into his image, through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. If we want to keep our hearts plowed, we must go to the Lord by reading his Word, praying to him, fasting, practicing hospitality to and with other Christians, and partaking of the Sacrament. You may see no fruit at first. But then there will be a sprout, and then a stock, and then leaves, and then fruit, even up to a hundredfold!

Lent is a good time to resume these practices and make them part of our life. It is a good time for plowing our hearts. And these “Gesima” Sundays of Pre-Lent are our annual reminder that planting time is coming. Jesus, the sower of the seed, is on his way! Let’s be ready.

*In the Name...*