

St. Bartholomew’s Anglican Church in the Town of Tonawanda, NY

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Scripture: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The Parable of the Sower: Sow What?

Sower, Soil or Seed?

This parable – known as the parable of the sower, also called the parable of the four soils, and could even be referred to as the parable of the seed – is one of only a few parables that is found in all four Gospels --- one of only a couple that Jesus specifically explains. That alone should cause us all to sit up and take notice.

So what really is a parable? It is simply an earthly story conveying a spiritual truth.

Why is this parable so important?

Jesus talks to us about what we hear – and how we respond to what we hear.

Some have used this parable to describe: the process of sowing and reaping, investing and return on investment, deposits and withdrawals, how to get the most out of life – not just here, but in the hereafter as well.

What I want to talk about today is --- what is at the heart of being a Christian.

Last week Father Ward spoke to us about service – using our gifts and talents to bring people into a relationship with Christ. We as Christians – followers of Christ – are called:

- To bring people into relationship with Him – and into a better way of life – Christ filled and Spirit filled.

My brothers and sisters--- this is to be one of our chief missions --- and not just for the clergy! The truth is we are all called to be sowers ourselves. So – what are we supposed to sow? Sow What?

Well, the **seed** that we are called to sow **is the Word of God**, – specifically **the Gospel of Jesus Christ**. **The sowing** is our using our God-given gifts and talents, and sharing the Good News of our own relationship with Christ.

Let’s take a closer look at some of that insight...

“A farmer went out to sow his seed”.

Now - I grew up on Long Island so I didn’t know many farmers. When I went on vacation to upstate I saw them, I saw their machinery, their silos. All that land - and all that hard work – all of it theirs to till!

Farmers know something about “making a living.”

- They know what it means to work.
- Farmers live with a strong work ethic; an attitude – if they don’t do it - it won’t get done.
- **(Did you hear about the farmer that told his son - who was complaining about work that he only had to work half days --- and he didn’t care which 12 hours he chose!)**
- Farmers know that if they don’t put it in the ground ---then it will never spring up out of the ground. You don’t plow a field in your mind, you need to get out and do it!

Maybe God is waiting for the attitude of the farmer to get a hold of us...get out and sow...to start scattering seed.

Some seed fell on the path:

I can vividly remember walking with my family from the Mount of Beatitudes down to the shore of the Sea of Galilee, at the Church of Peter’s Primacy. The path was winding, and all along the side of the path were grey rocks – pretty good size, just seeming to be everywhere. The ground was hard – this was ground that the people of Jesus time were familiar with – and it instantly brought me to this parable.

This experience transported me right into the Scripture and I can still visualize the farmer scattering seed and seeing some of it fall on the path, and by the wayside, off of the path.

Jesus was referring to folks who did not get it, who heard the message but failed to comprehend it... they did not understand... they didn’t “take it to heart” and therefore it did not feed them. So the birds came and ate it up. The birds represent Satan and the evil influence that he has in the world. Satan is the thief --- and like the birds that take the seed away, he robs us of God’s truth --- if we refuse to believe.

Jesus said the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. The truth is – there is good soil. The seeds that we have must find their way to the good soil. The path – or soil is the object of our evangelistic efforts. Our use of our gifts must be intentional... aimed towards people looking for answers.

- Saturday **August 13th** is just such an opportunity – **Rock, Rods and Relationships** – intentionally inviting others to share fellowship and to share our own witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives. We will indeed be planting seeds for the Kingdom of God, but it doesn’t end there – the seed needs to be cared for.

Have you ever planted some grass seed, only to have something eat it? How do you feel when you see the birds flying in and flying off with what you are scattering?

It can be discouraging if you feel like you missed the mark...failed to connect...or just wasted the seed.

- Of course you expect that some seed will take and some won’t. But discouragement comes if you keep looking at the seed the birds carried off ---- rather than watering and feeding what was planted, keeping an eye on the soil in anticipation of the growth that will take place.
- It is all about giving people an opportunity to hear the Gospel – **Let the Holy Spirit do the rest! It is God who provides the growth; we plant and water.** We as Christians must help to nurture the growth – through fellowship and relationships.

Some of the seed fell on rocky places, where there was no depth. Since the soil was shallow, they sprang up quickly and when the sun came out -- and guess what happened?

The seeds burned out! They were scorched by the sun. *If we are not careful we can burn out ourselves.*

If you recall – last week Father Ward reminded us about the need to stay connected, in relationship with God and connected to those we share our faith with, in fellowship and worshipping together. If we try to act on our own – we will indeed, like the seeds – grow a little, but then be burned out.

Often we see brand new Christians enthusiastically want to just jump into ministry, without having a chance to “put down roots” and the sun hasn’t even come out yet. The trials start in their life, things heat up and since there is no depth, they burn out and fall back – backsliding - into their old ways.

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Don't just get the seed – the Word of God to the people, we need to get it into the people.

Rocky places also represent people that many folks often overlook, often called **the fringes**, and those that **may not be in your normal circle of friends.**

That is why it is so important for all of us to meet visitors and make them feel welcome. Believe me – I can tell you first hand about the extraordinary welcome that Marilyn, John, Theresa and I have received and experienced.

That welcome – is the beginning for what I pray will be a long and wonderful relationship.

And it is because of relationship that so many people would stand on the shore and listen intently to the Lord as He spoke from the boat... because they felt His heart... His sincerity... His compassion... they knew that He truly cared about their lives.

Without relationship, withering takes place and the seedlings perish because they have no root.

The roots grow through teaching, spending time in the Word together, mentoring, discipleship... going alongside someone until they get a grip on the foundation and it becomes a lifestyle... until they take root. And when there are trials – there will be roots in the Body of Christ to withstand them.

Some fell among thorns....and the thorns grew up and choked the very life out of them. I don't like thorns – not one little bit!

How about you?

As a young man, I can remember my Mom and Dad taking great pride in their rose bushes. As the only boy with 3 sisters, it was my job to help them transplant, plant and even prune these bushes of different sizes and shapes. They were lovely, beautiful to look at, but I detested the thorns.

I tried everything – gloves, long sleeves, -- everything. I really learned something from that experience -- that thorns can't touch you unless you get in the middle of them. Thorns also like to rule the neighborhood in which they live – usually smothering anything growing around them.

The thorns that Jesus spoke of didn't have beautiful roses on them, but were really briars – with large prickly, sharp spikes. These thorns would smother anything trying to share the same soil. They took no prisoners!

No matter how big and tough you are, or you think you are, the thorns of life will stop you and choke the life out of you if you get mixed up with them. St Paul tells us “*Do not be misled: “**Bad company ruins good morals.**”*” **1 Corinthians 15:33**

It makes perfect sense to me --- If you keep running back to the briar patch, you will keep returning with the scars of that visit. It's not only the company you keep, but the culture of this world – the music, the movies, the internet, and even TV can have a tremendous scaring effect on our spiritual lives.

One of the important values in Christian life is “fellowship.” In fellowship -- Christians join together as we read in the Second Chapter of Acts-- “*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common*” (Acts 2:42-44)

We need to be in fellowship -- building **community with those that will not tear us apart**, -- **cut us to the bone or halt our forward progress.** Jesus pointed out that the “*worries of life*” and the *deceitfulness of riches and wealth*” were going to take our breath away....to choke life out of us....as if we are not connected to our oxygen supply. “*As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears*

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the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing.”

Matthew 13:22

Encouragement is oxygen to the soul.... in fellowship we encourage each other....we focus on the best that could possibly happen...growing God’s Kingdom – spreading the Gospel -- sowing more seed – for God to grow other believers.

There is another place that our seed falls that Jesus refers to as ‘good soil’.

Good soil produces a good crop. It’s here where you see your efforts keep on giving – as part of the ultimate evangelism experience.

Spreading the Gospel is not just what you say --- but how you act to others---

- It is not just preaching the Gospel --- it is living the Gospel!

St. Francis of Assisi is credited with saying – **“Preach the gospel everyday; and if necessary, use words”.**

The good soil is seeing someone who attended **Rock, Rods and Relationships** come to church and long to be fed. It’s watching your antagonistic, back-stabbing co-worker as they transform into a caring and self-less friend. It’s hearing someone who you have invited to church time and time again – finally say yes, and then want to come back again. It’s that season when you have given of yourself for others and you see the fruit manifesting in their life.

All because you went out to sow....you took the time to scatter seed and you stayed with the plant, nurturing it until it became strong enough to stand on its own and become fruitful. This is the place where we long to be...to be sharing His message, finding a seeking heart, watching the transformation that occurs as the Word of God gets in, and then that Word starts to come out!

God’s promise to us as we share our faith is that not only will we produce more who trust in him, the ones we produce will reproduce and the church will grow.....that is His plan. Jesus said **“You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.” John 15:16**

Jesus calls us to be His Body, to be His church:

St. Bartholomew’s is more than a church – it is a community. It is a community of believers that shares faith experiences....the good and the bad....because that is how we learn; that cares about people; lets them know how much we care by our actions. That’s the nurturing part.

I believe that St Bart’s is a family that is determined to see others find a life that is filled with the peace and joy of the Lord – **but it all begins with the seed, the Word of God.**

And you know it is a scary thing—getting the ball of evangelism rolling. It’s scary because we tend to spend a lot of time worrying and focusing on the beginning rather than the fruitful outcome. It begins and ends with relationship.

Jesus took every opportunity to share with those that surrounded Him. He loved them, gave them insight into their own lives and showed them how they could connect with Him in a deeper way and what the benefits would be in making that connection – eternal life in Him.

I am reminded of the great Christian song – We are One in the Spirit – from the 60’s – that says *And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, By our Love,*

Yes they’ll know we are Christians by our love.

Brothers and sisters – this is true --- but more importantly --- they’ll know we are Christians by whom we love, to whom we worship – and to whom we give the Glory!

So ---what seed will you scatter today?