

The title for today's message is: **Faith Lessons from a Farmer**

Matthew said: ***That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down.***

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now, I wasn't raised in a farming community, and Southern California is a long way from the plains of places like Central Kansas.

So farming isn't a world that I'm very familiar with. Look, it seemed that the only things that grew where I grew up, were buildings and freeways.

So, the "ins and outs" of farming is pretty much foreign to me. What I know about farming, I have only learned in recent years, and that's not much.

Yet learning about farming has deepened my understanding of Scripture dealing with seeds, wheat, weeds, the harvest and the like.

Look, Jesus uses many farming and agricultural images throughout the Scriptures, helping many even today to better understand Scripture.

Today's readings help us to focus on some of those images. Matthew said: ***That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow..."***

Now Farming was a bit different in Jesus' day than it is today. Farming today is done by tractor, where in Jesus' day it was done by wooden plows, pulled by donkeys or oxen.

There was no sophisticated equipment available to aid the farmer in planting the seed at the proper depth nor the distance between seeds.

And unlike today, the majority of the work was done by hand, back breaking work. Work done by both landowner and hired laborers.

There were laborers for planting the seed, for weeding, and for harvesting. The hired laborers would specialize in one aspect of farming.

Therefore they would move around the region, as their skills were needed in each area.

Simply put, the laborer who planted a field would not be around to see the results of his effort. Nor would the laborer who removed the weeds.

And likewise, the harvester would not know how much seed had been planted, or the exact amount of work that went into achieving the results.

Each focused on their own task, and trusted that the rest of the process would take place.

Even though planting was done by hand, there was still some common sense involved in the process.

For example, you don't bother to plant seed in an area that won't grow crops. Even us city folks know you can't expect to grow a crop on the highway!

But Jesus doesn't seem overly concerned with this farming strategy as He tells His story.

Look, sometimes seed ends up on the path, and when that happens, the birds get a free lunch.

The same is true with the rocky ground, and the thorny patch. The seed got there somehow, yet the sower isn't overly concerned about it.

If it sprouts and is scorched, or choked off, that's not for the sower to worry about. The sower's job is simply to sow the seed.

Finally Jesus gets to the seed that lands in the good soil. It brings in a variety of results: "some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

And today, Scholars disagree about what was considered a "good crop," but Jesus implies that even on "good soil," the size of the harvest can vary.

Look, there are many factors at work here, some of which we can't control. In Jesus' day, as in our own, the act of farming was in many ways an act of faith.

Trusting that God will take the seed that has been sown, and provide a harvest of God's own design. We just plant the seed, and leave the rest to God.

And Jesus is perfectly content to leave the parable there, no explanation needed. Here Jesus simply says: ***He who has ears, let him hear.***"

Its only after some time went by, and the disciples get to stew on it a bit, that they ask Jesus to explain the parable, which He does, yet reluctantly.

Jesus explains that the seed is the Word, and the different types of soil are different types of people:

The path is the person who hears the word but does not understand it. The rocky ground is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it; Yet falls away as soon as trials arise.

The soil filled with thorns is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world choke out the word, and it yields nothing.

The good soil, then, is the one who hears the word and understands it, and follows it, who indeed bears fruit.

As Jesus is going through His explanation, I can almost envision the disciples saying to themselves, “Oh yeah! I know someone like that rocky soil...nothing gets through.”

And we all get caught up in this. Perhaps you know of someone who yearns for stability in their life, yet they can't seem to get rooted into the Word of God.

Indeed the Church has always faced these questions of why: Why do some people hear the message, while others don't?

Why does God choose some people to be receptive and others who need so deeply to hear about God's love just can't, don't or won't accept it?

This mystery perplexed the disciples during the ministry of Jesus, and today, with all our technological and sociological advances, were still asking the same questions.

Why some and not others? God says in Isaiah chapter 55: ***“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*”**

As Jesus begins his explanation, He says: “Hear then the parable of the sower.”

This isn't some “Come here and I'll let you in on a secret” or “Here's what I really meant.” He tells them “You: listen up, this applies to you too.”

The disciples are not allowed the luxury of an abstract teaching that applies only in the philosophical, or only applies to other people.

They too are drawn into the teaching. How do you hear? What type of soil are you? Does your hearing lead to understanding?

Does your listening to the Word of God lead to the production of fruit? There is no room to stand in judgment of others, Jesus tells them.

Because if they are busy producing fruit for the kingdom, they will be more concerned with their task for mission and ministry than about the results of that task.

It's just like the sower. The sower isn't concerned about the fact that the birds are eating the seed from the path.

Nor, is the sower concerned that the seed sown on rocky soil will wither away.

The sower isn't concerned that the thorns will choke out some of the plants. The sower isn't even concerned about whether the plants will produce 30, 60, or 100 fold. That's for someone else to worry about.

Jesus reminds the disciples; "You just worry about your task, and let God worry about the rest."

After all, God has promised that the His Word will not return empty, but will accomplish that for which it was purposed.

How are our ears today? It's easy for us to fall into the temptation of trying to judge success, or to feel that we have to do it all when it comes to spreading the Good News about Jesus.

But we don't. Jesus reminds us again today that our task as His followers is to lead lives of faithful discipleship, trusting in God for all that we need.

Our task is to invite others to experience the God that we meet in worship, the God who promises to meet us in Word and Sacrament, and to let God deal with the rest.

Look, when you and I invite people to experience God in this place, we then are doing our God-given task.

When were eager to share our faith with others, and not worrying about "Will they think I'm weird?" then we are doing our God-given task.

When we trust that God's Word will not return empty, but will accomplish God's purpose, then we are doing our God-given task.

We are called to bear witness to the God who names and claims us in the waters of Holy Baptism, and to live lives focused on pleasing God alone.

Not trying to make other people happy. If we sow the seed and it produces a bounty, thanks be to God.

If we sow the seed and it produces nothing, thanks be to God. If we share our faith and invite someone to worship with us.

And it turns out that they join the Church and become good Christian people, thanks be to God.

If we share our faith and invite someone to worship, and it turns out that they only come Christmas and Easter, thanks be to God.

If we share our faith and invite someone to worship, and they never come, thanks be to God, His is in control.

We have still witnessed to the hope that is within us, and have let that person know that we believe in a God who works miracles.

And whether we see the results or not, the seed has been planted. We may never see the difference that little seed of faith may make in that person's life.

But God alone can take that seed and make it sprout into a plant that indeed bears fruit and yields, "some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

As Jesus said: ***Let anyone with ears listen!***"

Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.