

The title for today's message is: **The Parables About Response**

Jesus said: ***“The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.***

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

One summer, a drought threatened the crop in a small town. On a hot and dry Sunday, the Pastor told his congregation, "There isn't anything that will save us except to pray for rain.

Go home, pray, believe, and come back next Sunday ready to thank God for sending rain."

The people did as they were told and returned to church the following Sunday.

But as soon as the pastor saw them, he was furious. "We can't worship today. You do not yet believe," he said.

"But," they protested, "we prayed, and we do believe." "Believe?" he responded. "Then where are your umbrellas?"

"Where are your umbrellas?" The pastor was reminding the people that their faith needed to be seen in some action. "Where are your umbrellas".

Now, before we go on looking further into our text, it would help to look at the context.

So, let us go back to the beginning of chapter 4, and look at vv. 1 through 20. Here Jesus says that the response to the Word of God is like four soils.

In fact, in all three parables, Jesus points to our response to the Word of God. Now, in the first parable He says we were called by God to be good soil.

Yet, in the second and third parables, Jesus says that we were called to respond to God, by being good farmers.

Jesus is saying here that it's people's attitudes that are like the four kinds of soil, in which seeds are scattered.

In ancient times, the sower threw his seeds in every direction. Therefore some fell on hard soil, some on rocky soil, some on thorny soil, and finally some on good soil.

Here Jesus is instructing His apostles on how people responded to the Gospel, as He presented it.

And how the same people would respond to their preaching of the Holy Gospel after He was gone.

Jesus said; some seed fell on a path. Now, a path is simply a stretch of soil that has been packed down, by feet, animals, and carts, making it as hard as stone.

Therefore, making it impossible for the seed to enter into the soil, so as the seed laid there, the birds would fly down and eat the exposed seed.

The applied meaning here is that, people who are hardened against Jesus and the Kingdom of God, refuse to receive God's Word.

Jesus went on to say; some seed fell on rocky ground. That's right, there are people who, are like rocky ground. Maybe you know a few?

This is a soil that at first seems to receive the seeds, and even begin to sprout, yet soon after, the sprouts wither, because the soil is too shallow.

You see, hidden under the top soil is a layer of rock, which prohibits any real growth. This type of soil was a big problem for farmers in Israel.

I've heard the soil in Arizona is much like the soil in Israel. The people there plant trees, plants of all kinds, and shrubs, which initially start to grow.

But there too, the plants die off quickly, again because of the hidden rocky layer just under the top soil.

Maybe you've seen a few of these, their dramatic starters, yet with no real depth, their simply superficial Christians.

Now we come to the people who are much like the thorny soil. Here in this soil the seed falls, it begins to grow, yet, it too soon dies off.

Why? Because of the temptations of the world, which are like un-pulled weeds. There temptations that pull us away from the Kingdom of God.

They can be temptations of materialism, tensions about how unfair life is, or unresolved resentments about how life treats us

Jesus says: When you plant the seeds of faith, you also have to tend to the weeds.

Finally, some people are like the good soil. Jesus says in verse 20: ***But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.***

The key to understanding how the kingdom of God works in our lives is to recognize that not everyone represents good soil.

So, I ask you: "Do people really accept the Word of God, and produce the fruits of faithfulness?"

Well, good soil does bear good fruit. That's how Jesus describes positive response in the first parable, individually, and in our families.

Now, In the second, and third parables, Jesus describes positive response in terms of a good farmer, patiently, sowing, and nurturing his seeds.

Here, Jesus changes metaphors, from the Christian as good soil, to the Christian as being a good farmer, with patience.

Now, the consistent factors in all three parables are: First, the Word of God is like a seed, second; only God can grow the seed, and third; great growth is possible only in God's kingdom.

But don't forget, the Word of God had to take root in us in a slow-moving process, so it will be a slow-moving process in others too.

That's why we need patience like Jesus has. And if when Jesus sowed seeds, there were different responses, so it will be when we sow seeds.

And we should not expect that all seeds which we sow, will take root, and bear good fruit. Remember, our job is to sow and nurture the seed.

Only God can grow the seed and produce the good fruit. We're only called to do what we can do, and that is to plant and nurture the seed.

Now, I know very little about farming, the fact is, I grew up right here in sunny California. So, you might say.

I grew up thinking that food came only from the supermarket, not from seeds you plant, that grow into a crop.

Now, there are three things I have learned over the years about farming, which connect directly with the parables here in Mark.

One, growth depends on God. Two, we were all called to plant and nurture the seed. And Three, small beginnings can have great endings.

First, my farming friends taught me that, sowing seeds, means that we recognize what we can, and what we cannot do.

God alone produces the growth. Jesus said in verses 27 & 28: ***He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.***

Look, It's not our job to make disciples, but It is our job to scatter the seeds of faith, and to see to it, that the plants get water and plenty of sun.

It is our job, to tend to the weeds that grow, and try to choke off the growing plants. That's what nurturing is all about.

St. Paul puts it this way in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verses 6-9: ***I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.***

When it comes to being God's fellow workers, the first thing to realize is that we're not in control.

Were called to sow what God gives us. So, its God who gets the credit. We cannot boast about the success that comes when the seeds are sown.

We must be very cautious about taking credit for apparent success in the spiritual area.

For example, a visitor to the Vatican was quite impressed with the beauty and power of the place.

So he asked pope John the twenty third this question: "How many people do you have working here?"

With a twinkle in his eye, the pope replied, "About half of them." We must never get puffed up with ourselves in the spiritual realm.

The planting and nurturing of the seed can produce great growth if we're patient, that is patient hard-working farmers.

Today's text is about our response, as farmers in partnership with God. When this partnership works, the growth of the Word of God may be slow.

But it can be highly productive. One of the places where we see this growth of the Word, is in the Christian family.

Many good Christian parents have told me that they're very concerned about their adult children because they have stopped attending church.

And who no longer practice the faith they learned while in their childhood homes.

While this is a great concern, there really isn't much we can do to keep our children in the faith. Other than to pray!

Sure we planted, or sowed the seeds, and nurtured them, keeping the weeds out of our garden of faith when our children were small.

But we cannot guarantee that our children will practice the faith they grow up with.

No doubt, parents of small children today have their work cut out for them, I mean with so many pressures on families.

Just keeping families together, nurturing the children in the faith, and teaching the truths of Christ, in the home, as well as in the church.

Look the kingdom of God means growth like a seed being nurtured in good soil so that it might mature.

Christian maturity takes place by Christian witnesses, and parents pointing to what Jesus did by suffering and dying for us on the cross.

When the seed blossoms to maturity, it can be a thing of beauty. Yes, small beginnings can have great endings. 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.