

**Weekend of Sunday, July 12, 2020**

**6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 15/Proper 10/Year A**

**First Reading: Isaiah 55:10-13**

**Second Reading: Romans 8:1-11**

**Gospel Reading: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

**Sermon Title: “Growing in Faith, Hope, and Love”**

## **Theme**

*In Matthew’s gospel, both Jesus and his disciples “sow the seed” of God’s word by proclaiming the good news that “the kingdom of heaven is near.” Now, in a memorable parable, Jesus explains why this good news produces different results in those who hear.*

## **Text**

<sup>1</sup>That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. <sup>2</sup>Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. <sup>3</sup>And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup>And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. <sup>5</sup>Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup>Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup>Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup>Let anyone with ears listen!”

<sup>18</sup>“Hear then the parable of the sower. <sup>19</sup>When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. <sup>20</sup>As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup>yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. <sup>22</sup>As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. <sup>23</sup>But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

## Sermon

When I see a lection that begins, "That same day," I want to know what happened previously that may inform what happened in the passage that we have.

What happened early that same day was that Jesus was visited by his mother and brothers who asked to see him. Jesus' response was,

"Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" <sup>49</sup>And pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>50</sup>For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

This might seem difficult to hear. Was Jesus disrespecting his mother and brothers? I will come back to it later.

When I see a lection that deliberately leaves a section out, I want to know what the lectionary editors left out. Today's Gospel Reading is 13:1-9 and then jumps to :18-23. Sometimes, the Gospeler includes details of a time when Jesus was interrupted by someone in the middle of a longer story, and if that was the case, most times the exclusion doesn't matter. However, in this case, I think that what was left out matters.

So, in the Gospel Reading, Jesus, surrounded by "great crowds," got into a boat so that he could social-distance himself a bit so that more could hear, and he told the parable that we have come to know as "the Sower and the Seed." He concluded that parable by saying, "<sup>9</sup>Let anyone with ears listen."

What we missed in the part of Matthew's Gospel that was left out is his Disciples asking him why he speaks in parables. And what he answered was that there are some he wants to teach "the secrets of heaven" as he called them, and there are others who will never get it no matter how hard he tries, so why bother. It is sad to hear our Lord Jesus say that, but our experience of the world is the same, isn't it?

Back to his mother and brothers, we know at least one who became a disciple, and that was James. What about the others? We simply do not know. Speculating that Mary was a widow by this time, they probably took the responsibility to care for her – which is a good thing. But they may have been unable to believe that their own

brother was the Messiah of God, and I speculate that this is the reason Matthew included it in his Gospel.

For us, faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ was probably passed on to us by people we love and respect, and who love us, and we trust, would never lie to us. This is what we promise to do in infant baptism. But I suspect that for Jesus' own flesh and blood to believe that he was the Messiah of God would be a challenge, although we should wonder why Mary wouldn't straighten them all out. Well, who knows?

Moving on to the second part of the Gospel reading, Jesus explained the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, but from what I read, not to the crowds, just to his Disciples. Again that would be in keeping with what he said about his need to teach them and others - some will never get it.

Now we could spend time talking about the parable and what it means but I am guessing that you have heard numerous sermons on this parable and oh, by the way, he explained it himself in the second part. So I would rather spend the rest of my time with you putting this all together in a sermon I entitled, "Growing in Faith, Hope, and Love" after all, that is exactly what we modern-day disciples are to do.

Whether his mother and brothers believed it or not, Jesus had a God-given mission to save the world, and nothing was going to keep him from it. At the point at which he took on that mission at his baptism, Jesus was focused on accomplishing his mission. Nothing, not even his own mother and brothers, could distract him from his mission. And while it might seem disrespectful to us, aren't we glad he was so focused?

About his mission, in that way that he always had, Jesus knew that some will get it and others won't. Though I believe the sower in the parable is actually God or Jesus himself, we participate in the parable when we throw seeds of faith by the living of our lives of discipleship. So our role in this parable is to just continue to live lives of faith, hope, and love, recognizing that some will understand us and our demeanor and some won't.

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

What does this look like in real life? I'm so glad you asked. The whole world is involved in a global pandemic.

We can run around trying to do business, as usual, disregarding the strong recommendations of leaders in the field of infectious diseases

Or we can operate in the exact opposite way and be so paranoid that we barely function at all.

Or, I think there is a better way. Publicly, we should listen to the recommendations and do as we are told, but function. Let the living of our lives be an example to others. Let us love others, even people we do not know, by showing them respect and protect them from infection by wearing a mask and avoiding points of contact.

Taking another front-burner issue of the day, racism, we can remain the uninvolved bystander and say this is not our fight. Or we can say, as I said last weekend, by definition, "All lives cannot matter until black lives matter" and step in and support the movement for equality when we see racism.

And privately, we should be in prayer for ourselves, our loved ones, and all the people of the world. And we should pray for those who are afflicted, and for those who work in medical institutions to keep people alive, and for those who work on vaccines and cures, and pray for peace and for people who work for peace.

And then when people see how unruffled we are, and they ask about it, we can say, we have faith that God's got this.

Some will think we are crazy – they are the ones about whom Jesus said, do NOT have ears to hear.

Some will ask about our faith. They are the ones about whom Jesus said were like the seed sown on rocky ground if that is as far as their curiosity takes them.

Or they might be like the seed sown among the thorns. When we get through this, they will forget about a life of faith.

But there will be some who will be like the seed thrown on good soil. The pandemic or racism may be just the invitation that they need to be introduced to God revealed in Jesus Christ.

But as Jesus said, we can't know the difference. That is not our call. We are just supposed to live our lives, growing in faith hope, and love, trusting that God's got this.

### **Prayer**

Almighty God, we thank you for planting in us the seed of your word. By your Holy Spirit help us to receive it with joy, live according to it, and grow in faith and hope and love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen