

GOD CONTIUES TO SOW HIS WORD

Hear the Word of God for this Sexagesima Sunday, as the Church prepares us for the penitential season of Lent:

But the ones in the good earth, these remain those who, in (a) heart beautiful and good, having heard the Word, continue to hold fast and continue to produce fruit in patient endurance. ¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

The theme for this week is found in grasping the eternal truth that God's grace is shown in His sowing His good Word in all people. The Word has been given that we also learn not to trust anything in ourselves to provide for its growth. It also helps us to remember that we who are being saved may be the ones, at times, in which the Word strives, struggles and fights to produce fruit in those in whom it has been cast. That reminds us of our daily temptations to sin and evil desires. It keeps before us the Word which we are given to empower us to drown those things so that our new natures in Christ might rise up to live before God and one another.

So, today, we have a parable – a story with a meaning. It is a form of teaching that is used frequently by Jesus. He tells us why that is true. He declares that this Scripture, God's inspired Word, might be fulfilled:

Seeing, not they are seeing, and hearing, not they may understand.²

Jesus does not always, in the immediate context of teaching through a parable, give its meaning. But today He does. From Jesus' teaching to His disciples, we may discern the parable's application in the Church.

That is this at its center: the Word that is sown is Good. That means that it is of God, for only God is truly Good. From that then, we learn that the soil is the human heart. Now, that is not the emotional center of a human which will get its day next Saturday, but the very center of that which makes one human.

¹ Luke 8:15.

² Luke 8:10b; cf. *Isaiah* 6:9; and its use in *Acts* 28:26.

It is interesting that God-in-our-flesh uses the imagery of soil to show where He casts His Word. Dirt, after all, is the material from which He created Man. It is the substance to which all people return – ashes to ashes, dust to dust. It is through the image of good seed sown in the medium of the dust of the earth that God uses to describe where He broadcasts the Word which produces life and growth.

(Today's parable provides an illustration which is proclaimed every year at this time. It serves to prepare us for hearing the words given at the Imposition of Ashes on Ash Wednesday). That Good Word is sown, as Jesus declares in all manner of people. That is true even when the soil in which it is sown – as in an unrepentant sinner – is poor.

That last point leads us to one of the most important “takeaways” from today's Word of God. That is the truth that the reality that people do not persevere, cling to and trust in the Faith unto the end of their days is not God's fault nor His will. The Word that is sown, in all the examples Jesus provides in the parable, is good. Despite that, the reason that people fall into one of the unfruitful soil categories of the text – alongside the path; in the stones; in the thorns in particular, is –

that they willfully turn away from the Holy Commandment, grieve and embitter the Holy Spirit, become entangled again in the filth of the world, and decorate the habitation of the heart for the devil. ³

So, when you heard the Word of Jesus earlier today, did you reflect on what kind of soil, what kind of dust of the earth, you might be considered?

This day's text, declared first to the Twelve, as St. Mark's parallel record of this biblical-historical event teaches, provided examples of falling into such things in the times which followed. ⁴ Judas Iscariot fell into the category of the earth along the path, in which the seed of the Word found no root – Satan came and gobbled him up. This may be the only one of the four types of soil in the parable from which there is no

³ Bente, F. Concordia Triglotta, “Thorough Declaration, XI, ‘Of God's Eternal Election,’” St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1917, p. 1076,

⁴ *Mark* 4:10.

recovery into life and some sort of fruit-bearing, however small a produce the creature of the dirt may produce.

Of the other types of soil in the saying, perhaps St. Matthew was the rich young man who first went away from following Jesus when He told him to give away all his possessions and follow Him. In Matthew's Gospel, he does not name himself as one of the followers of Jesus until the ninth chapter, much later than several of the other disciples. (Yet, that narrative of the rich young ruler comes after Jesus names the Twelve, so maybe not). St. Peter fits the description of one whose fruit is choked off by the cares and concerns of this world. Peter denied Jesus three times, and fell away from the Faith, until the Word came again and restored him. The others also fell away from bearing their crosses when Jesus picked up His, and may have fallen into the second and third categories of the soil in the parable.

Of those who were His disciples, only one man really fits the description of the good soil in which the fruit of the Faith comes forth. All others left Jesus to die on the cross. Even those at His feet, John, Mary and the other women, were there without hope. As He died, they confessed and displayed no faith in the atoning death and resurrection of the Crucified One. Just one man, as Jesus hung suspended between heaven and earth, bridging in His sinless self the Holy Father and all sinful humans, only one man produced the fruit of the Faith which endured. He was crucified next to Jesus. Hear again what Jesus declares about the good soil which describes people of the Faith:

*But the ones in the good earth, these remain those who, in (a) heart beautiful and good, having heard the Word, continue to hold fast and continue to produce fruit in patient endurance.*⁵

The good work, the good fruit, which the Word produced in the "thief on the cross," the one convicted of insurrection and terrorism, endures even today when that Gospel account is read. God sows His Good Word in all manner of people. If he could

⁵ Luke 8:15.

be saved and produce an eternal testimony, if the Eleven also made from dust of the earth in whom the seed of the Word was not snatched away and eaten by the devil were restored by the Word, then, so can all manner of people hear, believe and produce the fruits of the Faith. If a murderer of the followers of Jesus can be restored through the working of the Law and the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus, then there is hope for you! Not one of you is known to have been a persecutor of the people of God as was St. Paul.

So, throughout this service, you have been looking, a little or a lot, to the East Chancel wall. There you can see the Ten Words engraved in stone under the arms of the Cross. Perhaps, for some of you, they have hung here so long that you now look through them, past them, or just above them. Yet, there they remain. Look at them now. Have you kept them to the Letter of the Law in the Spirit of the Faith perfectly always, every day since you first heard and believed that Jesus is your Lord and Savior?

A few weeks ago, a short Law section of a sermon dealt with sins against the Sixth Commandment. But, there are nine others for you to break, daily, if somehow you have managed to keep that one. Any sin, all sin, turns you from being the good soil that the Word flourishes in and produces fruit, 30, 60, a hundred times beyond the person. What then are you to do?

Hear and believe anew, afresh, the life-giving Gospel. Jesus knows that His followers, His disciples from the time of His incarnate ministry onward until the Last Day would fall into many and various sins against His Holy Word. He determined, with the Father and the Spirit, to turn poor soil into beautiful and good soil. He allowed Himself to bear all the dirt and filth of sinners, of you, onto the wood of the curse. He hung on the Tree of death. His life-blood poured down onto the soil from which all men were made in our father Adam. As the mortal and Divine Life that was in that blood poured into the ground, the earth received it. That which was cursed in Adam's Fall received the Life which had been denied it.

Then, to seal eternally that which His blood bought, His body was sealed in the

earth. There, God-in-our-flesh did not return to the dust from which His mortal nature came. No, He redeemed the dust from eternal death. He broke the bonds of the curse, and rose from the dead.

Then, that you might be the beautiful and good soil that the Word needs to produce much fruit, Jesus gave you His Spirit. As water, that which once covered the earth when it was formless and void, as water washed over you, you died and rose again to new life in Jesus. His pure, beautiful, and good heart – for He is God – His heart is yours. He has given His good heart to you – through your hearing of His Word.

In that Divine Seed, the Word is planted deep in you who are of the earth that has been renewed by His blood. He repeatedly calls you to this place that you might hear His Word and be strengthened in His Faith. Jesus, through His Word, Visible and proclaimed, gives you His ability to hold fast unto the end of your earthly days. He uses that Word, planted deep within you, to bring forth the fruits He desires. As you remain in His Word, as you are fed by His Sacramental Presence, you are given the ability to bear your crosses in this life. Because He remains in you, you remain in Him. He grants you His patient endurance all the days of your life through simple means.

His Word and Sacraments grant you His steadfastness in the Faith whenever you face the temptations of the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh. The Divine gifts restore you to the Faith when you fall. They preserve you from the evil one. In Christ, you remain the good soil in which God's Word bears much fruit.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Sexagesima (Historic One-year series)

Psalm 84: Isaiah 55:10-13; I Corinthians 11:19-12:9; Luke 8:4-15

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Soli Deo Gloria