

Good Soil

Luke 8:4-15 And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: ⁵ "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. ⁶ And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. ⁷ And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. ⁸ And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." ⁹ And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, ¹⁰ he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'" ¹¹ Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹² The ones along the path are those who have heard. Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³ And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. ¹⁴ And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. ¹⁵ As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 One day the soil was good and easy to work. It produced ample amounts of food simply when seed was scattered on it. There were never any weeds in the rows of plants. The seed was never plucked away by birds. Each seed produced a healthy plant, which produced an abundance of fruit or vegetables. One day the soil was full of nutrients, easy to work. One day the soil was good. The next day the soil was bad. Suddenly, the ground was hard and the soil seemed to reject the seed. It sat on top of the hard soil until birds snatched it away. The seed that did sprout in this soil had to compete with rocks and—never before seen in the sower's garden—weeds. One day the soil was good; the next it was bad.

2 What happened in between those days? Sin. Before sin, creation was as it was intended to be. Soil received seeds and nurtured them into plants which produced good fruit. The task of tending to the Garden of Eden hardly could be considered work by today's standards. Sure it was work, but it was easy, enjoyable, delightful even. And it didn't cost Adam a drop of sweat or blood. But then sin happened. Or, more precisely,

Adam and his wife committed sin. They rebelled against their creator, sought to invert the heavenly order prescribed to creation, made themselves their own gods. And even the soil, from which Adam was created, was cursed because of his sin.

3 Since then, there has been no good soil. Whenever Adam's offspring take up Adam's task of tilling the soil and sowing seed, like Adam rebelling against his Lord, so the soil rebels against its lord. Seed scattered never falls on good soil like it did before the fall into sin. Some seed falls along the path and gets trampled underfoot or eaten by birds. Some falls in rocky soil and produces plants that wither away for lack of water. Some falls among thorns and is choked out. Since Adam's sin, there has been no good soil. Lest you miss the point, the Lord makes the meaning of the parable crystal clear. The seed is the Word of God.

4 How do you receive God's Word? Does it fall on a hard heart, a heart better suited to feeding the devil than producing the fruit of faith? Do you hear the Word of God like Abraham and Sarah, laughing at the thought that these preposterous promises from the mouth of the Lord could be true? Does the seed of the Word fall in rocky soil? Do you hear the Word of God like the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, who, having received it with joy for a while, flee in the time of trial? Does the seed fall on thorny soil? Do you receive the Word of God like Solomon, letting God have his place among the false gods of wealth, pleasure, self-indulgence, and cares of this life? There is no good soil. So repent.

5 If the seed is the Word of God, what is the Word of God? Is it the Bible? Maybe. Although Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures because you think in them you have eternal life, but it is they that testify about me." You can make the Bible say nearly anything you want it to say. But Jesus would give you a swift, stern rebuke if you find anything in the Scriptures other than Him. He is, after all, the Word of God. As St. John testified, He is the Word of God who in the beginning was with God and was God. He is

the Word through whom all things were made. He is the Word who became flesh and dwelled among us. He is the living Word of God, and all Scripture testifies about Him.

6 The one telling the parable, Jesus, is the Word of God. He is the Seed scattered seemingly foolishly on bad soil. He is the Seed trampled under the feet of the Roman soldiers on the hard soil as they lead Him out of Jerusalem to Calvary. He is the Seed planted in the rocky soil of Calvary as He was nailed to the cross. He is the Seed withering and dying of thirst on the cross. He is the Seed among thorns, crowned with thorns as He hung dying. He is the seed that fell on bad soil and died there. But as the Seed Himself said, "Unless a seed falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." (Jn 12:24)

7 The soil may be bad, but the Seed is good. The Lord promises, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will achieve what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Is 55:10-11) The Seed of the Word of God makes the soil on which it falls good, fertile soil. It accomplishes the purpose for which the Lord sends it. Faith comes by hearing, and so the Lord has caused you to hear the good news of Christ crucified for you, your Lord having paid the penalty for your sinfulness.

8 The Word of God has gone forth and has changed you from bad soil to good soil. As the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return without watering the earth, making the soil fertile, so the Word of God in the waters of Holy Baptism has changed your wicked, hard, rocky, thorny heart into one that has received the Lord's gift of faith. The Word of God has gone forth from the mouth of the Lord in Holy Absolution. As He created by speaking a word, so He creates faith with a word. His Word accomplishes what it says. You are forgiven. The Word of God goes forth to you even

now, through the mouth of a man, to deliver faith and forgiveness of sins, to guard and sustain that faith. The Word of God will go forth in a minute to accomplish the purpose for which the Lord sends it. The Words of the Lord will speak into existence things that are not. At His Word, "This is my body...This is my blood," you may have confidence that it achieves the purpose for which the Lord has spoken it. Here on His altar will be the body and blood of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, for you to eat and to drink. This Word-made-flesh does what it says: "for the forgiveness of your sins." It provides seed for the sower and bread for you, the eater. Here is the bread of life.

9 So you are good soil. The Lord's powerful Word has come to you. It continues to come to you. And it will not cease to accomplish what the Lord desires for you: salvation and life eternal. It will not cease to achieve His purpose: forgiveness of your sins. His Word has made you new, given you new life, and caused you to bear the fruit of faith.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
Pastor Jeff Hemmer
Hope, Jerseyville
Sexagesima, AD 2008