

Sexagesima, A ✕ D 2009

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 The Sower is not a good farmer. A good farmer prepares the soil for planting. As soon as the crops are harvested, he begins to work the soil to make it ready for next year's planting. He discs; he fertilizes; he plows. And when it comes time to plant, he plants carefully in rows. He sows seed only where the ground has been carefully prepared. The Sower, however, is reckless. He throws the seed everywhere. Because of His carelessness, some falls on the road and gets trampled or carried away by the birds. What a waste. Because of His imprecision, some falls on rocky soil. It grows for a while, but withers when the summer sun gets hot and the July skies dry up. Still wasteful. Because of the Sower's recklessness, some seed falls among thorns and is choked out by the vicious weeds. What a waste of good seed!

2 "The sower sows, his reckless love/
Scatters abroad the goodly seed,/ Intent alone that all may have/
The wholesome loaves that all men need. Though some be snatched and some be scorched/
And some be choked and matted flat,/ The sower sows; his heart cries out,/ 'Oh, what of that, and what of that?'" What of that and what of that? The seed is the word of God, and the soil is the hearts of hearers. This is not a parable about those who refuse to hear the Word of God, those outside the Church. Like last week's parable, this one is about you.

3 The Sower is reckless with His seed. He scatters it everywhere. It falls on the path trodden by the cares of the world. It falls on hearts where the devil quickly snatches it away, ears that hear only selectively, wanting the Word of God not to be too offensive, not to call them to repentance. It falls on the hard path, trodden by the feet of the world, hardened by the sins you enjoy. It falls on the path both to Sodom and to

Ninevah. In one, it's plucked away by the devil, leaving none penitent except Lot and his family; in the other, it brings repentance and faith to every citizen of the city except the prophet sent to preach there. It falls on the rocky soil, bringing about immediate faith and joy but withering in times of testing. It falls on hearts who have no root of Christian life, hearts that assumed that a life of faith would be free from cross and trial. It falls among thorns, hearts more enamored with the praise of men than the praise of God, that love the pleasures of life more than the pleasure of faith.

4 Still the Sower sows. His Word has no season; He scatters it year-round, day-in and day-out. He scatters it among the faithful and the hypocrites, on receptive hearts and rock-hard rebellious hearts. He sows the seed of His word on your heart. Which type of soil is your heart? At times, you're all these different types of soil. There's no heart that's constantly receptive to God's Word. Repent of supposing yourself good soil, receptive to God's Word. Repent of judging the type of soil the hearts of others are. The Sower isn't looking for good soil. He's just looking for dirt. Any type will do.

5 That's the difference between the Divine Sower and any other farmer. The Sower sows the seed of the Word of God. As the rain and 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 the Lord's word be that goes out from His mouth; it shall not return to Him empty, but it shall accomplish that which He purposes and shall succeed in the thing for which He sends it. Not even Monsanto can make seed like this: the Seed of the Word of God has the power to transform hard soil into fertile loam, to make thorny soil free from weeds, and to change rocky soil into nutrient-rich, arable ground.

6 The one telling the parable, Jesus, is the Word of God. He is both the Sower and 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 seed—scattered recklessly, wantonly, extravagantly, imprecisely—lands in the hard, thorny, rocky soil of your heart. From this lifeless soil, the Word brings forth faith. Faith cleanses your heart (Ac. 15:9), makes the soil fertile, brings life from death.

8 It's reckless; it's foolish. The Lord sends forth sowers, preachers, to scatter the seed of His Word. "Of all his scattered plenteousness/ One-fourth waves ripe on hill and flat,/ And bears a harvest hundredfold:/ 'Ah, what of that, Lord, what of that!' Preach you the Word and plant it home/ And never faint; the Harvest Lord/ Who gave the sower seed to sow/ Will watch and tend His planted Word." Everywhere, the Lord casts the seed of His Word everywhere. He's willing to risk having it be food for birds and fodder for devils. He'll risk planting in shallow, rocky soil where it will wither in times of testing. He'll risk scattering the seed of His precious word among thorns, among those who prefer worldly passions.

9 He'll even risk scattering it here. It's pretty reckless, the wanton scattering of the Word of God. From an ordinary font, the Lord tosses out the seed of His Word. It lands in hearts rebellious against Him. And it does not return to Him empty. Everyone upon whom it falls from the scattering place of the font is made a child of God, even those who let the devil pluck the seed away later, who wither in times of trial, who go back to their worldly passions. But the Lord's sowing isn't finished in the font. Throughout your life, as long as you have ears, as long as you remain hearing, He's sowing through His ministers. From their mouths, He scatters the word of Absolution. It's pure recklessness. When sinners confess the state of their hearts, when they acknowledge the hardness of the soil, the overwhelming presence of rocks, the threatening growth of weeds, a sensible farmer would go looking for better soil. But exactly when He hears you confess the barrenness of the soil of your heart, He scatters the Word of Absolution on your heart, cleansing the soil with faith and forgiveness of sins.

10 Particularly reckless is the way the Lord scatters the seed of His Word from this altar. Here, the Lord scatters His Word over bread and wine, planting in them His very Body and Blood. And then He scatters these into your mouth. He plants Himself within you, bears the fruit of faith from your sinful heart, cleanses the soil of your heart by His very presence.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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