

Luke 8:4-15 | The Parable of the Sower

✦ I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good morning.

“**What** are we going to get out of following you?” That’s the question Peter had asked, and that’s the question that prompts Jesus to tell his disciples the parable of the vineyard.

That's the parable we heard last Sunday: that the kingdom of heaven is like a vineyard, and that the master of the house hired laborers for his vineyard, from dawn until nearly dusk. Hour by hour, the master went out to hire laborers. Those who labored all day were disappointed to receive what was promised.

In this parable, Jesus warns his disciples against following him for what’s in it for them in this life. Following Jesus just for what’s in it for them in this life is going to lead them to begrudge the master of the vineyard, to be jealous of fellow laborers, and to — perhaps — ultimately reject Jesus altogether.

Such rejections of Jesus will come. Yet as saddening and disheartening as it is to see those who fall away, there is something keenly, brightly joyful about those whom the Lord calls to himself, those whom we thought would never follow Jesus, those whom we thought were simply beyond hope.

Again and again, the master of the vineyard goes out into the marketplace and hires laborers. And he continues to hire them until it is nearly dusk, until almost no more work can be done, until evening is just about at hand.

And so as strong as this parable is a warning against falling away, even stronger still is this parable in terms of hope and encouragement that God finds followers in all stages of our lives and at all times throughout history. The Lord finds his sheep, and his sheep hear his voice, and they are invited to be his followers for life.

And so, knowing these things — knowing that this parable is a warning, knowing that some have and some will fall away, yet that God is always graciously seeking laborers, and knowing that we have good, eternal work to be done, let us continue in faith in Jesus for life, taking what comes in stride and in faith.

This morning we heard the Parable of the Sower. This is the central parable through which we understand all of the ministry of Jesus, and the whole spread of the Gospel. The sowers the seed; much of the seed sprouts and grows; some bears fruit.

The seed of the gospel is scattered. The seed grows where it can for as long as it can. But to be fruitful, it needs to be rooted in good soil. Otherwise, there is the strong danger that the plant will wilt and die. In other words, there is strong danger that the one who hears it will stop believing it.

There was this very danger of the gospel wilting and dying in the hearts and minds of the Corinthians, from Paul’s second letter to them which we heard this morning.

It seems, just as in our time of late, the central crisis in the Corinthian Church was the question of Authority. Who could the church trust? Who was the church to believe? Who should the church listen to?

Who we listen to, who we believe, shapes our lives as disciples and the direction we take as we follow Jesus together. Recently, on social media, there have been some so-called Christian “leaders” who have tried to justify and teach polygamy *again*. This is yet one more case of someone trying to use Christianity to justify sin.

Paul has a warning for these men and for all who seek Christianity without seeking repentance: *“Their end will correspond to their deeds. (2 Corinthians 11:15b, ESV)”*

We can imagine—if not in the case of polygamy, then in the case of any other sin—that there would be new or weak or immature Christians who would be led astray by such things. Until the Lord returns in glory to judge the living and the dead, there will be those who try to take his glory and his flock through evil means.

That's what was taking place at Corinth. Men who were not appointed as Apostles nevertheless claimed to be apostles. In fact, they claimed to be Super Apostles — men who claimed to be from Christ and sent from Christ and yet — neither proclaimed Christ nor lived according to his message.

In an attempt to win favor and influence, these “super-apostles” bragged about so-called spiritual things so that they would be listened to and that Paul and the other real apostles would not be listened to.

In the passage we heard, Paul has had enough. And so, he brags, too — but his bragging is not about what he has done, but about his weaknesses, for it is in his weakness that God's power has been demonstrated — weakness especially in suffering.

There we see those beautiful and comforting words to all who here suffer in this life: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” No, God will not always give salve, end the suffering, or answer in the way you would have him — but He himself will be the sweetness, the salve, and your strength through your suffering.

That is, in essence, our faith. God's power made perfect in Christ *on the cross*. If ever we want to avoid our lot or suffering in this life, we turn to the only one who is always perfect, and we see that God's grace was sufficient for our Lord Jesus, even as he suffered and died on the cross. The way to perfection is not strength upon strength, but suffering.

Nearly all false preachers—except perhaps masochists—will miss this point, because they tend to have pleasure or comfort in view. They, like the false apostles against whom Paul warns, seek pleasure, comfort, riches. But that was not the way of the Lord, and so it is not the way of the Christian.

When we remember that the way of the Cross is the way of Suffering, then we will not be so easily deceived by this world and we will have a greater appreciation for this parable — the Parable of the Sower. And so, let us reflect on three things: (1) the indiscriminate sowing of God's Word; (2) many who hear turn away from faith; and (3) some keep the faith and bear much fruit.

(1) The first fact of this parable is the indiscriminate sowing of the Word of God.

The gospel goes everywhere, whether it will be received or not. We would think it foolish and wasteful to try to plant seeds in our parking lots, and among our walkways, and on top of the mulch, and in many places. But though it is unlikely that anything should ever grow there, it is nevertheless *not wasteful*, but reveals God's character, his generosity and his grace.

What appears a foolhardy method of sowing seeds is actually a generous one. There is plenty of seed to go around. There will not be a shortage of God's Word.

I think we are tempted to be too crafty with the scattering of these seeds. We almost seem to want to be too careful to keep our seeds in an airtight, dark pouch, and not to get any out until we are sure it is exactly the right moment — and then we will scatter! We seem to want the garden to be tilled, the soil fertilized, moisture present, and so on — and then we may indeed speak about our faith. But unless the soil conditions are just right, we are prone to keep the words of eternal life to ourselves.

But this is not the Lord's method. Indeed, just reflect on the ministry of Jesus, how frequently he performed signs, how frequently he taught, and still — how frequently he was rejected. At the end of his ministry, after his death and resurrection and ascension, there are 120 persons waiting for him to send his Spirit.

Where is everyone else who heard him and saw the miracles he did? Why were there not many more? Why did everyone who saw him and heard him *not* believe?

We reflect instead on our own faith. We believe. We want to continue believing. We cannot let these very words of eternal life which we have been given and to which we have been entrusted go.

And so, we cannot be the kinds of people who don't cherish and guard it, lest it not take root. We cannot be the kinds of people who let anything else — whether cares, riches, or pleasures — overtake it.

For there is no avoiding the second truth — that there are those who will not keep the faith.

(2) The second fact of this parable is this: many who hear will turn away from the faith.

There are some who turn away immediately, and there are some who turn from faith after a time. I suspect we know both sorts — those who reject the good news outright, and those who reject Jesus slowly, after a long period of time.

Jesus warns us of three ways people fall away: (1) that for some, Satan takes away the good news; (2) that for others, they receive Jesus with joy but have no root and therefore fall away in times of testing; and (3) that for still others, they receive Jesus but are choked by the cares, riches, pleasures of this life.

Who has fallen away, among those you know? Among your family, friends, coworkers?

These three clues help us discern those who have begun to fall away, how to encourage and warn them, and how to pray for them.

We can reflect on those whom we know have fallen away and ask which of these categories took place. Was it Satan who took away the gospel? Was it a time of testing that took faith away? Was it simply this life—cares, riches, or pleasures—which took up all the attention and so now the seed of faith has withered?

Having reflected, we can talk to them, encourage and warn them, and pray for them. We pray that they return to the faith, the faith which will bring them into eternal life with Jesus.

It's perhaps worth pointing out that weeds are not wheat or grapes, and that weeds grow incredibly well in almost every kind of place. In whatever crevice where the fruit of wheat or a grape might have been planted, a weed is sure to grow. Just examine a driveway, a parking lot, a sidewalk. There, weeds have found a way to grow. Weeds tend to find a way to choke out whatever that has grown that is good. That is what weeds do.

Weeds are everywhere. Everyone believes something; everyone is religious—whether they give their religion a name or not. Only the Gospel — the news that Christ crucified ends sin and brings life — is worth believing and keeping and propagating. Grapes and wheat must be cultivated.

There is more to this parable: not everyone falls away. And that brings us to the third thing:

(3) Some receive the Word, keep it, and bear *much* fruit.

This directly corresponds to the Parable of the Vineyard which we heard last week. These are those who remain at work in the Vineyard *for life*. These are those who remain in their father's house *for life*. And these who labor, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, are fruitful to thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.

These are those whom were given gifts for God's kingdom and have put them to use. These are those who regularly worship and regularly practice their faith; these are those for whom faith is not simply one thing to do among many, but one's entire life.

The Parable of the Vineyard shows that there is eternal work to be done at all times. Some just wanted was owed them, that they may go on their way — these correspond to those who have fallen away. But there are those who want to remain in the Vineyard forever.

Perhaps you have already seen the fruitfulness that comes from faith. Perhaps you have already seen evidence of the kind of good fruit that endures unto eternal life.

Much of this fruit is visible only to God. Much of this fruit — the fruit that comes from keeping the faith and practicing our faith — will be made clear to us only in the life that is to come.

What is clear for all those who hold faith in Jesus' death and resurrection, is that there can be nothing more worthy than knowing him, than giving him our time, than giving him our labor and our gifts. When it comes to all the things that compete for our attention and our praise, nothing can compare to worshiping Jesus, the one who saves us from our sin.

*2 My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.*

And so, together, we press on in faith in Jesus — that we may be well-rooted and very fruitful.

Christ the Lord is worthy of all worship and praise and glory and honor and majesty, now and forever. **Amen and amen.**