

Lord, make these words to be your Word, that our hearts might become your Heart.

Well, here is a perfect gospel passage for summertime – Jesus teaching on a beach, about gardens. Beaches and gardens are about as summery as it gets.

I love tending my gardens – don't have a clue what I'm doing, but I just do it.

When I moved in, there were no plants in the large beds in front of my house.

You all helped me fill those in, and there's often something blooming.

Not by any grand design – I just acquire plants and it sort of works.

But I didn't have a vegetable garden. So I staked out a plot, my neighbor roto-tilled

it for me; Paul Eldredge brought me a truckload of well-aged manure, and I

weeded and raked a bit, Then I plunked things in and hoped they would grow.

And lo and behold, things come up! Most of the time...

Maybe I'm a little like the sower in Jesus' story sounds like – she seemed

to scatter seeds somewhat carelessly, not attending to where they land.

Now, one of the great things about parables is that they are open to so many interpretations and ways of seeing; you can turn them this way and that and see different facets in them. And you can identify with different characters.

So today, what if we say we're the seeds. We've been cast around by the sower.

Where have you landed? Are you on the path, here but clueless as to what any of this means, easy pickings for birds of prey who tell you this spiritual life is silly?

"Stick with what you can see," those birds whisper to us. "Faith is nuts."

Are you "on the rocks," having the occasional intense spiritual experience

but no root system to help you weather the times when life challenges faith?

Are you trying to grow amidst the thorns of anxiety and stress

about all the things there are to cause us anxiety and stress these days,

all you want and feel you need, that choke off your spiritual life?

Or are you rooted deep in good, rich soil, being nurtured and ready to bear fruit?

Well, we're all here for church this morning, and most every Sunday,

so I say we are seeds who have landed in enough good soil

that we're actually seeking to grow in our faith and relationship to God.

As one of your gardeners, I can see when some of us are partly in the thorns,

or a little vulnerable to the birds or the heat, but we're planted.

So then, how about the people we know - where have they rooted?

- > Do you know anyone who's heard about Jesus,
but never heard the Good News of what Jesus means for the world –
that God loves us so much, God made sure we had access to him through Christ?
A person who thinks Christianity is about being good, rather than being loved,
is going to be pretty vulnerable to those birds of prey in the parable.
- > Do you know anyone who's vaguely "spiritual," or a churchgoer by habit,
but it doesn't go very deep?
- > Do you know anyone who's being "choked by the cares of the world
and the lures of wealth" whom you can help into better soil?
How might you help them into more nutritious soil?

Now, I like this parable, but I want Jesus to continue the story.

He's observing the spiritual landscape very accurately:

God's Word does come and land like seeds in people in all these different ways.
It only seems to really take root in some, or our churches would be full.
But I don't think we're just supposed to look at that and shrug and say,
"Oh well. Too bad for those other seeds."

No, I think there's a role for a gardener – or a team of gardeners,
who are able to help transplant those seeds into soil where they can bear fruit.
So my updated version might be called "The Parable of the Transplanter."

God made us for fruitfulness, saw that we were planted or moved into good soil.
Just as a seed already has contained within it all that it needs to grow –
as long as it is nurtured with water and nutrients from the soil –
so we already have within us the power we need to be fruitful.

God spoke, through the prophet Isaiah, about his Word being like a seed –
A seed that sprouts and grows and becomes grain and feeds.

*So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

Friends, we are seeds God is sending! God wants to see us bear fruit in
helping move other plants to where they can be fruitful as well.

God's Word is living and active – and God's Word is alive in us.

That's what the Spirit of Christ is, alive in us!

Sometimes, like a seed, it has to be activated by water and light, but it's there.
We need to let it break open and grow, and grow out of us, and help others grow.
That does involve some work; in the spiritual life there's always some work,
even if the results are not ultimately up to us.

After I plant my vegetables and flowers I have to do some work –

I have to make sure they get enough sun and water, keep out the weeds...

So we do the work of repentance – weeding and pruning.

We get fertilized with God's word. We stay watered with prayer and worship.

We actively cultivate our relationship with God, becoming ever more aware of God's activity in our lives and being able to tell those stories.

Think of a time your connection to God has made a difference to you –

those are often times of trauma and pain, and sometimes of great joy and both.

Someone needs to hear that story – maybe someone you thought of earlier.

I want Christ Church to become ever more intentional about nurturing our connection to God and each other.

I want us to be proactive about transplanting others to good soil,

to share our spiritual selves with people we know who are anxious or hurting.

Who came to mind in that list we made a few minutes ago?

I want you to make a list of folks and pray for them each day for two weeks –

See them in the light of God's love. Pray that they be blessed beyond measure.

Whenever you have a chance to be part of that blessing, open that door.

A deep truth embedded in this parable of Jesus' is that a seed cannot grow itself. It cannot make itself grow. At most, it can allow itself to grow.

Everything grows better when we're intentional about it.

That means making sure we're well watered too, and fed on the Word,

on the nourishment we get in being in close contact with God,

and in talking and praying and being together.

Finally, there is this knowledge that a seed must burst open in order to become a plant that can bear fruit.

God has made us for fruitfulness.

We need to be willing to let God break us open,

to spill out our life in order to be fruitful.

That is painful, that is joyful. That is Life in God.

And that Life will never end. The garden of God is always growing,

And we will grow together, wherever we are planted – or transplanted.

Amen.

SERMON HANDOUT

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." Matthew 13:23

Who do you know who is "on the path," acquainted with the Christian faith but not understanding, prey to all kinds of birds?

- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____

Who do you know who is "on the rocky soil," spiritual but without deep roots in knowing God, easily scorched when adversity hits?

- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____

Who do you know who is "choked by thorns," distracted by anxiety and accumulating material things?

- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____

What are you going to do for these friends this week?

- ◆ Pray for them each day, for God to bless them?
- ◆ Give them a call to see how they are?
- ◆ Invite them to something we offer at Christ Church?
- ◆ Tell them what a difference God and church make in your life?
- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____

How are you going to be nurtured in good soil this week?

Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

Jesus went out of the house and **sat beside the sea**. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying:

"Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 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. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

"Hear then the parable of the sower. 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. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;

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. 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. 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."

Isaiah 55:10-13

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.