

July 10, 2011 4 Pentecost Year A Matt 13:1-9. 18-23 The Sower and the Soil

Today's Gospel begins a series of parables unique to Matthew that are all "farming" parables. Each of the 3, in its own way tries to explain what the Kingdom of God Is LIKE. In the coming weeks, we will listen to stories about seeds, and grains, things buried in a field. In order to describe Jesus' Kingdom, his agricultural stories use images familiar to farmers, but are clearly different than the ways in which people are used to behaving. Because, after all, the Kingdom is familiar, but different-better than the ways in which we are used to behaving. The Kingdom is just, it is generous. And so we need to listen with our hearts and well as normal ears.

Today, all three of our selected readings deal with the theme of HOPE. Isaiah promises us that we will go out in joy, and be led back in peace, and we will not be cut off from God. As if having read this very passage, Paul, in his letter to the Romans, tell us that even though we sin, even if we have died in sin, we have Christ Jesus with us, and we too, because of the Spirit of God, will also be raised from the dead.

Hope abounds in our Gospel. The parable of the sower can also be called the parable of the soils, because the sower, Jesus, is casting seeds, life giving opportunities, everywhere, not just in a select few places. Everyone has a chance to receive God's blessing. I told you "Bible farming" is different!

Those of us who listen have deep soil and bear grain. We are people who hear the Gospel. We respond. The word of grace takes charge of our lives. We grow and mature into Christians.

And it is our responsibility to help those who don't get the saving message. Whether or not we proclaim the Gospel is not really an option. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Jesus also commanded, "Go and make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." If we love him, we evangelize. And this is more than just a matter of obedience. It is a matter of our soul's health. As we grow in obedience, we grow in love. As we grow in love, our souls grow in health.

One of the images in the parable is useful in thinking about what this means. The seed that falls on the deep cultivated soil grows to maturity and productivity. One image for evangelism is the cultivation of the soil where the seed of the Gospel will fall. Almost all mature Christians we might question will describe how they were loved into an awareness of God's love. The love may have come from a father, or a mother, or a brother, a sister, a wife, a husband, or a friend. The love entered the life of the person preparing them for the love of God. One person said, "My wife loved me into submission; I realized that I was immersed in the love of Jesus flowing through her. When I finally heard the call to claim Jesus as Savior, I

couldn't refuse." Another person said, "It was granddaddy. I went to church and Sunday school every week because he came and got me and took me. He loved me in other ways. He used to hold me in his lap. I know that he was teaching me that there is a place on God's lap where only I fit and belong."

These are just two illustrations of the cultivation of love. Love prepares the way for love. It may be that those who have known a lot of love can know the love of God when it comes more easily than others can. They can recognize it. What kind of soil are you right now? All of us have parts of our lives like the path, or the shallow soil, or the tangled place where there are weeds. The degree to which we focus on these troubled areas of our lives is the degree to which we will not "get it". Give those areas over to God and then *don't take them back*.

Instead, live in the part of your life that is deep and well cultivated so that the Gospel can grow there. God's love and your best, and your *desire* can bear the fruit that will feed the world.

We are talking about the battle of good and evil. But there's hope in this battle. The great hope in this story is the life-changing experience of knowing Jesus Christ as personal Savior.

When that happens, then indeed we have heard with our ears the call of the Kingdom of God and we have found that surely the Lord is in this place.

We thank God for God's infallible wisdom, for God's infinite love, and for God's forbearance that goes beyond our understanding. God is a god of surprise. God meets us with hope, compassion, concern, acceptance, and guidance—when we are not even looking for God. God even reaches out and touches the lives of those who do not seek God. We need to awaken to God's presence each and every day. It is then that we discover where we are: we are in the House of God and we find that because of God's son Jesus, we are at the gate of heaven. We find hope

We need not sit in judgment on others and we should ignore those who judge with a judgment that is not our own. We need to trust only in God's judgment. We need to hear God when God asks us to pray for those who are disheartened by evil and for those who feel oppressed because the life they have known may be changing faster than they are emotionally or spiritually able to comprehend. We pray that God might work a healing of those lives. When this happens we find we are part of God's plan in doing God's work and growing the wheat of the harvest that leads us to God.

We do have hope and hope gives way to faith and faith gives us the presence of Christ—and Christ forgives us and welcomes us to spend eternity in his presence. The Holy Spirit is working in us even this moment. We have an Easter experience of the resurrection and a Pentecost experience of the movement of the Holy Spirit.