

“Where Will Your Seeds Fall?”

Matthew 13 : 1-9, 18-23

Remember the following nursery rhyme? It asks the question, "Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow?" This parable of Jesus asks the church the same question. It's all about seed and four different soils that receive it. It's a parable of how different people respond to the Gospel.

The first is stolen seed.

Jesus said, "A sower went out to sow his seed, and as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trodden underfoot. And the birds of the air devoured it." Anyone who has ever planted a garden knows the ruin of crows. And here we have a great mystery of the faith. In His explanation of this parable, Jesus said, "The ones along the path are those who have heard the Gospel; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, that they may not believe and be saved"

Did you know that the late atheist Madelyn Murray O'Hare was reared a Presbyterian? New York's Son of Sam, the serial killer, was a former Baptist. Two dramatic examples of what can happen to a person when the seed intended for them falls on the path and is eaten by birds.

After buying a new home, the owner began to landscape the lawn himself. Since it was his first attempt to plant a lawn, he was careful to do everything according to the book. He prepared the soil, put in a sprinkling system, and then waited for the right day. When that day came he seeded the lawn, rolled it, and watered it. For the next three weeks he watered the lawn daily, shooed away the birds and his cat, and waited eagerly for the first blades of grass to peek through. Except for a few weeds, nothing happened. Then one Saturday morning he discovered the sack of grass seed - still in the garage. "What in the world did you plant?" his wife asked. With a sigh, the man replied, "Kitty litter."

You might wonder, looking at some people, if bad seed, sort of kitty litter, weren't sown in their lives instead of the Gospel. Jesus assures us that there is nothing wrong with the Biblical Gospel. It'll grow if given the chance. The problem is that the devil comes along and snatches away the seed.

We've all observed this in people. A person can go to church every Sunday their whole life, but it doesn't show in how they live their lives and treat other

people the other six days of the week. Their seed was probably stolen by the devil, long ago.

A second type of response, Jesus said, is likened to rocky soil. Seed falls on this ground, springs to life, but since it has no depth of soil for roots, it withers away in the heat of daylight.

I have personally seen this with a jailhouse conversion. I once was acquainted with a man who was sentenced to five months in the county jail in McHenry County Illinois because he stabbed another man in the leg with a pocket knife. Before he went to jail his life consisted of smoking dope and getting into all kinds of trouble. After he got locked up however, he was visited by a jail chaplain who introduced him to Christ. This man then started reading the Bible, praying, and talking religious. While he was in jail he wrote letters to me telling me about his new found faith and how excited he was about God. His letters were heavily laced with quotes from the Bible.

Then after his five months were up and he exchanged the orange jumpsuit for his street clothes, he forgot about God and went back to his old way of life.

The seeds of the Gospel falling on rocky soil....growing up quickly and then dying just as quickly, because they fell on rocky soil and never took root. The gust of emotion dwindles. The rocky soil people find out that God doesn't always come when you whistle. They thought that God would be their cosmic butler who waits on them hand and foot, and then they discover that God doesn't quite operate that way. Bible study is a chore. They want to be selective about obedience. And the next thing you know, they're out the door.

Remember! Jesus said it'd be like this! "No depth of soil," Jesus said. Shallow.

A third soil Jesus called thorny ground. Christ put it this way: "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it." Indeed! Every gardener knows the menace of crabgrass and thistle. Jesus, in His explanation of this parable, said, "As for what fell among 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."

I have spent a little time over in Europe, and so have some of you. The continent of Europe is post-Christian. Churches are everywhere. Splendid cathedrals! But they are mostly empty. The people are out working, playing, sleeping, holidaying - with zero time for the things of Christ. Again, there is no fruit.

But not to despair, for Christ spoke of yet a fourth soil, fertile and deep.

"And some seed fell into **good soil**, and grew, and yielded a hundredfold."

These are persons, Jesus explained, who receive the Word and carefully allow it to take root in their lives so that fruit is born.

And what is fruit? Galatians 5:22 calls it love. This is a reminder of the great commandment in Matthew 22. God asks us to love Him with all our intellect, emotion, and will. And to love our neighbor as ourselves.

None of the first three soils can in any sense be called conversion. Each of the three ends with no life in the seed, no response to the Word.

A garden club published the minutes from their meeting in a newspaper. It read: "The day lilies we planted around the courthouse all died for the third straight year. The club voted to replant the lilies and also to adopt as our club motto, 'To dream the impossible dream!' "

True faith is not an impossible dream. It is God's dream for all people. It is God's desire that all people will come to Him through Jesus Christ. Whether or not they do really depends on which soil the seeds of the Gospel will fall -- the beaten path, rocky soil, thorny soil, or good soil.

AMEN.