

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

"And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As [Jesus] said these things, He called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

And when His disciples asked Him what this parable meant, 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.*'" ...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." (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dearly Beloved,

We often describe a parable as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. This is a true statement.

But there is another way to describe a parable:

a parable is a story of Jesus told to conceal and reveal mysteries about the kingdom of God.

This idea is found in that curious saying of Jesus:

"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*'" (a quote from Isaiah chapter 6:9-10).

It sounds, at first, as if the Lord does not want some people to understand, and as a result, not to be saved.

But we know that this can't be a correct understanding of this Word of our Lord

because Paul very clearly states under inspiration by Holy Spirit

that God "**desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**"¹ Timothy 2:3-5

And, in truth, we see that in the parable too, don't we?

The Lord is the Sower and He sows liberally, recklessly, without discrimination between the soils.

If He did not want all the world to be saved, He would be careful about where He sowed the seed.

He wouldn't waste it on the path, simply to be taken up by the birds.

or in the rocky soil to wither away at the slightest heat from the sun.

But as Jesus quotes from Isaiah, He is acknowledging the truth of man's natural heart.

It is a hardened path that objects to the penetrating work of God upon it.

The more God shows and bestows His grace upon us,

the more our eyes get used to it and we take it for granted, like the rising of the sun each day.

The more He declares to you the forgiveness of your sins,

the heavier your natural ears become as the declaration starts to be simply a thing the pastor says

because it is printed in the hymnary.

You hear the weekly sermon. But by Sunday noon, you can't remember a thing about it.

It's even more embarrassing when you are the pastor who wrote and delivered the sermon

and by evening on Sunday, you struggle to recall the main points about it.

So quickly the devil takes away what was so generously sown, yet did not penetrate the soul.

So the fault is not with the Sower that the seed doesn't grow, nor with the seed itself, but with us.

In fact, we see the seed growing where it does penetrate the soil, don't we?

It grows readily enough among the stony, weedy and good soils.

In fact, with the stony ground, it is only because of the seed that it grows.

It springs up as the joy of the gospel hits the ears of the listener...

but the immediate joy is not followed up by more listening,

And so that Word once given is not watered; it **has no moisture**.

It has no depth of soil and its roots find no holding, and it withers under the trials in this world.

This is as when someone comes to the pastor for private confession or godly counsel regarding their marriage, or children, or work, or overwhelming burdens of guilt.

You seek his pastoral care.

You are reminded of your baptism and the promises of God never to leave you or forsake you.

Christ is given to you in His death and resurrection as He is presented as your crucified Lord.

Some receive the Lord's Supper for strength to bear your crosses and stand up under your trials.

You are forgiven and are so appreciative. Your burden is lifted.

And go back comforted by your Lord into the world's trials of your vocations again.

...But then you don't return to the Lord's house or the pastor's office to hear more

of that same unburdening Word, to be watered and strengthened for trials and temptations that you face on a daily, weekly basis.

And so that seed which sprung up with such promise withers away soon after.

...

The seed grows in the weedy soil also.

Here the seed is able to put down roots and get moisture.

The hearer comes again and again to hear more of that Word that gave you relief, joy, and hope.

You go to the Divine Service, to Sunday school and Bible Class.

You take confirmation class (either willingly or under compulsion) or adult instruction, and the seed of the Word is watered and grows; Christ lives and grows in your heart.

You hear Christ read, you read Him yourself in home devotions... and the stalk grows.

But along with that stalk are the thorns and thistles, **the cares and riches and pleasures of life**.

Notice that this is not the devil stealing Christ away.

It is not the world's trials that would hinder the root from taking hold.

But it is from within your own heart that these thorny temptations spring up.

As you become more confident in your understanding and knowledge of Christ, what had at first taken on more priority and devotion, or at least more of your concentrated attention, now slides into just another one of your priorities.

You skip a Sunday or a devotion here and there as other things begin to take on more priority.

And soon you are able to be absent for a whole month without even missing it.

Instead of making and setting aside the time, and freeing up the leisure to hear and receive,

it becomes just another thing to fit into the schedule among the **other cares and pleasures of life**.

You still hear the Word, sporadically. You are still in good standing in the congregation.

You even participate in an organization or two of the congregation.

You are still a good person helping out here and there at church, at work, at school, at home...

But what is the result of this? Christ's fruit gets choked out.

Your self-examinations become less thorough as the idea of weeding out certain sins seems too painful.
Your love for those whom Christ has redeemed gradually becomes lukewarm, verging on cold.
Your service to God toward your neighbor, *your help and befriending, improving and protecting*,
becomes more self-serving, more focused on helping and improving and protecting yourself.
Your hearing of Christ becomes more routine and taken for granted,
rather than recognizing it as the necessity for life and salvation.

...

Dearly beloved by Christ,

The seed brings life and vitality to your unfruitful heart.

That is to say that Christ brings life and vitality to your dead, stony, and weedy heart.

This parable bears its fruit

when those who hear it, see Christ and His power of salvation revealed in it...

when the soil of your heart is analyzed,

not to see how good and fruitful you are,

but in order to examine your heart and determine what spiritual care you need,

whether to be plowed up,

or to have the Lord take care of the rocks,

or to weed out the distractions.... or all 3.

This parable bears its fruit

when this soil analysis, or self-examination, is recognized,

not as the point and goal of this parable,

but simply as the preparation for the seed of the Gospel to take root, to be watered,

and to grow to fruitful maturity.

Remember that it is the seed that has the life.

"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God."

Or perhaps more clearly, instead of "secrets", the mysteries of the kingdom of God.

The mystery of the kingdom of God is that it comes, not by our own work and efforts,

not by our soil analysis, or our repentance, or decisions,

but by the humble life and work of redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ our Savior.

It comes by the seed of God's eternal Word being implanted

through the hearing ears of Mary into her womb,

and growing up through the stones and weeds of this life, bearing the heat of the sun,

shunning the deceitfulness of riches and pleasures of this life,

as Jesus eagerly hears and believes every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

He brings forth righteous fruit to maturity, where upon the stalk of the cross, He suffered death,

and fell into the tomb of the earth, thus buried for all eternity

the birds, the stones and the weeds that He has removed from your heart.

Of His death and resurrection, He says, **unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,**

it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. John12:24

You are that fruit of Christ. And so He **calls out** to you, **"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."**

This is better translated, not as, **"let him hear,"** but **"let him keep on hearing."**

a continual hearing, one that doesn't stop, and wither and get choked and become unfruitful.
The good soil is made good in its hearing the Word.

Here, spiritual life and vitality are sown into your soul which holds it fast,
and is made an honest and good heart by the continual work of the Spirit,
plowing and picking and weeding, making it receptive and rejoicing in God's good works.

So the fruitfulness of the good soil is seen that it keeps on hearing and receiving the water of life.

It keeps on hearing... and examining and repenting.

It keeps on hearing... and receiving forgiveness.

It keeps on hearing... and partaking of the fruit of Mary's womb, the body and blood of Jesus,
that once fell down the earth in death, yet lives, and bears much fruit in you.

It keeps on hearing... and bearing outward fruit in services of love and mercy to your neighbor.

It keeps on hearing... and like the disciples, seeking for further clarification of what isn't understood...

It keeps on hearing your Savior speak to you of His everlasting love and forgiveness.

It keeps on hearing your Savior bless you.

and now stand to hear and receive your Savior's blessing...

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,

keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto everlasting life.

C: Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria