

Sermon Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 Romans 8:1-11 July 13, 2008

The Seed of Our Salvation – In a Nut Shell

You don't even have to be a farmer to get it. Jesus' teaching cuts right to the heart of every issue – and not all the technological sophistication of our 21st century lives can change that.

The sower and the seed.

You'd get the point, we get the point, before Jesus took time to tell us the point. It's so simple – so clear and clean a story. So straight to the point. It's good summer Sunday stuff. It's too nice a time to do much heavy thinking. So – a little parable makes for good worship.

Except.... The story does get a bit personal doesn't it? Maybe, if we let them Jesus' words get way too personal. From 2,000 years away it can seem as if Jesus is talking right in this room.

Hear then the parable – as for what was sown in good soil, this is the one indeed who bears fruit.

How is the soil in your life? No neat little story now, is it? It has a point, this parable, and the point is pointed right at us. Assuming this little story has something to do with us and our lives, how has the soil in your life been – when it comes to the kind of fruit, the goodness – that grows wherever you are? How's your farming?

Let us pray...

Lord of this day, in this hour, by the power of Your Spirit, may the words of my mouth and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people, be acceptable in your sight and your good word to us in Christ. Amen.

I suspect we could all say that we've been all four kinds of soil at one time or another in our lives. Sometimes the fruits of the Spirit of God in Christ have flowed unselfishly out of our lives. We've done good things and good things happened - to us and through us for others. Sometimes.

And sometimes, sometimes, in our lives its been like being in a car accident – and watching it happen at the same time. The wrong thing happens – and we are powerless to change what is happening - it just happens – and we cause it to happen.

Instead of the kinds words needed - we spread gossip about someone. Instead of caring deeds, we please ourselves first, and second and third. Over and over again.

And our lives a closer to looking like weed patches than flowering gardens of good deeds. We see it around us - always a little easier to see it around us - see people making poor choices in their lives - with their time and money. We live in a society now that - for all the volunteer publicity – companies whose employees “volunteer” to do good thing on their days off - even build Habitat Homes.

And – we did help build a Habitat Home – we did a bit more than 2 weeks of work, though - We bought the home...

Still - we live in a society where people will spend more for their coffee each month than for any kind of charity or church ... And where the huge mortgage crisis has to do with lenders and borrowers both guided by greed more than common sense.

Habitat can be just good works making us look good - but There is some seed of truth, truth about our real hope in life and death in the Habitat Experience. We give of ourselves - money and time. To do a truly good and generous thing. But – our efforts alone would have fallen short of what was needed. We needed the plumbers and electricians and the cement people and the carpenters - all to finish the work,,, to complete what we helped to begin. And – that – in a nutshell – is the story of the Christian faith.

We need help to live well day by day in this world, and we surely need help to live into the promise that can be ours of eternal life.

Yes - There are good things for us to do in life - the seed of goodness, of graciousness and kindness and love.... That seed has been sown – We can be this way because the one who made us for this world calls us to be this way.

We know the wonder of God in God's world - The wonder of creation in all its mystery in the atom and in the majesty of the universe...

And the wonder is in God's word - 10 commandments to guide us, Beattitudes to point out to us good practices for a good life .

And in response to the wonder of the world and God's word we do good things... but time and time again there is as Paul says... Another force at work in our lives – there is a selfishness, a self centeredness that has made our lives, sometimes, like anything but good soil.

Paths too busy to take Jesus and his way of sharing seriously. Lives too driven by the powers of suggestion from the media that messes with our values every day - spend, don't save.... Get don't give.... Temptations to want so much more than we need.....

That's Paul's word of warning to us.... In Romans - to a society not unlike ours... losing its drive and focus ... indulging self interest way more than a call to goodness.

Paul said – on our own, by our own flesh – we can do a little good, but not a lot. Temptation will get to us , will undo us, will leave us living more for ourselves than for true goodness in Christ. It's a bit hard to get Paul's main point - but the gist of it is that there are 2 ways Of living.....

Oe is guided by the compass of our own choosing – The other is guided, encouraged by the Spirit of Christ. The compass of our own choosings has no steady north needle - it leads us most often where our own desires and wants tell us we want to go..

But Paul calls us to live another way.... Guided instead by Jesus Christ and his teaching. We can live up to being the persons God wants us to be.

And this truth is at the heart of the Sacrament of Baptism. This simple thing we do - because Jesus Christ called us, commanded us to do it. And when we do it, every time we do it, we remind ourselves that by ourselves we cannot build a habitat house, or, a truly good life.

We need God's grace, God's forgiving, cleansing new life giving grace in Jesus Christ. This is the seed of our salvation - And it can grow in us - if we give it time - In part that's also what this Sunday Worship is all about - about giving us time to receive and nurture a bit the good seed in our lives.

It's what VBS is about - and Sunday School - ways we try to help to prepare Ground that is good where seeds can land and lodge and grow...

It is, we hope, this Church and its life - its ministries and missions - we hope we are a place where together we can let the Spirit of God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, can give life to our mortal bodies. ...

Good, gracious, godly living to our bodies through his spirit dwelling in us more and more. The old Godspell song sang it... to love him more freely, to serve him more clearly, to follow him more nearly... day by day by day.

It is this promise of the power of the living Christ we preach about, and teach about and try to follow.... That in this life we can live until we die - or - we can live into life that knows no end.

This past week Tony Snow - former news person and Press Secretary for the President - died from colon cancer at 53. Last year after his diagnosis he wrote these lines...

Blessings arrive in unexpected packages, in my case, Cancer. I don't know why I have cancer, and I don't much care. This I know - we are fallen. We are imperfect. Our bodies give out.

But despite this God offers the possibility of salvation and grace. In Paul's Words.. Tony Snow said - We need to remember we are born not into death, but into life. The journey continues after we have finished our days on this earth. And knowing this we can open our eyes and our hearts.

The moment you enter the valley of the shadow of death, things change. We can learn what Jesus Christ tried to teach us. That in this mortal body lives the seed of our immortality - our faith in God's promises.

God doesn't promise us tomorrow - he does promise us eternity. And it is our call to nurture that seed of promise and hope, in us and in others. What kind of soil are we? In the trials and troubles of life God bids us to choose. Do we believe or do we not? Snow asks.

Will we be bold enough to love, daring enough to serve, humble enough to submit, and strong enough to acknowledge our limitations? Can we surrender our concern on things that don't matter, so that we might devote our remaining days to things that do?

We may not know how our contest with sin and sickness will end. But we have felt the ineluctable touch of God. No matter how bleak or frightening our prognoses, our faith says, our prospects lie in the hallow of God's hand.

Thank you, Tony Snow – for reminding us in word and deed, in your living and dying, that the seed of our salvation lies in the nutshell of that truth... May we be good soil in which that faith may grow.... As we worship the living God, Study God's living word, and serve God through Christ like living.

Amen.

David W. Robertson, Pastor