**THE BALLAD OF A SOWER**

***(Based on the Parable in Matthew 13:1-11, 18-23)***

**The Sixth Sunday After Pentecost**

**Trinity Lutheran Church**

**Springfield, Missouri**

**12 July *Anno Domini* 2020**

**Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**There were so many people gathered from so many different places, it would not do to call them a crowd or even a huge crowd. The assembly was composed of *great crowds*. All of them were fixed on a man who presented himself before them; all had come with their expectations, whether it was the first time they had ever attended one of his events, or they had come back for more. No performer of their time, well, actually of anytime they were aware, had ever put on the show this guy could deliver. And when He chose to make the event a lecture or a sermon, no public speaker or teacher ever spoke with such authority as he spoke and taught.**

**Part of the draw was that this performer, this teacher was such a man of mystery. Who was he? From where did he come? How could such abilities, such skills, such wisdom, such power be hidden all these years?**

**This event was an outdoor performance. There was no indoor arena there on the shores of the Sea of Galilee to hold such crowds. The beach would do.**

**Suddenly he appeared in his simple dress, his twelve man stage security close at hand. So that all could see Him, and that He would have His back to no one, he created his stage, climbing up into one of the commercial fishing rigs there. The show was about to begin. A hush fell over the crowd. It appeared that this performance would be a lecture and/or a sermon. He opened His mouth:**

***A sower went out to sow***

**Such a simple opening line, yet in that culture and in those crowds of mostly ordinary citizens, it rolled off His poetic tongue and powerfully beautiful voice like a song unsung. In this case, the music behind the lyric included the gentle wind and the waves rolling into the sand. The master entertainer was about to tell one of his stories.**

***And as He sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, 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 produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.***

**PENTECOST 6—page 2**

**He paused to let people think about this parable He had just told, and the challenge He left with them. He threw out a few other parables, also without interpretation. And then the curtain came down. Just like that it was if someone turned the page, act one was over without costume change. The principal was ready to leave the stage. The crowd couldn’t understand.**

**We get that still today. Can you remember a time when you felt let down and cheated when you bought tickets for a performance whose advertisements raised high expectations, but then the show itself was a dud. A concert, an off-Broadway production, maybe a recommended movie or Netflix series? Perhaps an early Ozark Mountain Daredevils Reunion Concert, but you didn’t know about an internal feud until you got there; you got a good show, but still not the same without Larry and Randle. Were you not entitled to a partial refund?**

**How can Jesus just throw out a parable like that, challenge His audience to hear and learn from it, with an implicit promise that He has given them something important that can change their lives, and then just walk away before telling them what it means!**

**To be sure His twelve disciples felt the crowd pressure. They came to Jesus in a private post-performance meeting and pressed Him. Why did You do that, Lord? “*Why do You speak to them in parables*?” What good is that doing for the people? How is that gaining Him and His movement any momentum on the road to glory?**

**Jesus seems to do a one-eighty! With the Twelve he explains the meaning of the Ballad of the Sower:**

***When anyone hears the Word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the hard path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for awhile, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the Word, immediately he 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 deceitfulness of riches choke the Word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the Word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.***

**Jesus’ interpretation of The Ballad of the Sower does explain a very important mystery of how the Word of God works, and how sinners can get into the kingdom of God. The seed in the parable is the Word of God; the soil in all its varieties stands for the multitudes of people in all of their diversities that hear the Word of God. Jesus Himself is the Sower. He distributes the Word of God as liberally as possible. A farmer would consider His method of sowing reckless and wasteful. And indeed most of it never takes root and produces. But that which does produce yields great harvests.**

**PENTECOST 6—page 3**

**But Jesus’ disciples not only are asking for answers to the question of how the kingdom of God works. They are much more interested in the question why. Why does He hide the meaning of these kind of parables from the very people whom they are trying to win, and not to the crowds at large, the great numbers of people coming to see His miracles and listen to His speeches. Can Jesus not see that His ministry and tours in Galilee are not going all that well? Many come to see and hear Him, but walk away without joining the movement. Why? Cannot the Jesus who can with a Word override nature and its laws, instantly heal terminal disease, and raise the dead, fix it so that all people who hear the Word of God accept it? Why some and not others?**

**Their questions are still today our immediate concerns as we share the Gospel in our own context of space and time. In the Ballad of the Sower, He puts in perspective why His ministry in Galilee is going the way it is, and why it seems He is less than successful. And we twenty-first century disciples still need this parable today as we live in the same situation the first Christians did. We remain a minority in culture and still must deal with the rejection, ridicule, and hostility from without, as well as an equally difficult challenge from within—the idolatrous demand of God, that He be successful for us in regards to popularity, growth in numbers, and blessings of health and wealth. The Ballad of the Sower is a gift of its Author just as much for us as for the first disciples.**

**Three take-aways: first, we should know that the ministry of Jesus through His Church will not always or automatically be successful in the ways that our fallen, sinful nature measures success. When we faithfully confess, share, teach, and preach God’ Word, it will rarely produce large numbers of new converts. We often will incite more opposition than any other result. Jesus Himself met with widespread rejection and had enemies who hated Him with an irrational and lethal revenge. Yet Jesus did not fight back or compromise the Truth in order to gain them by giving them what they wanted or saying what they wanted to hear. He took it, all of it, and with humility, weakness, resistible-ness, and submission to death on the cross reconciled all of them, and in the process, all of humanity to God, that all might have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. That is what the Church is all about: living in the light of this salvation and sharing this Good News.**

**Second, this explains why the Sower so liberally throws His Gospel seed everywhere. God really does desire all people to be saved. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that all who believe in Him will not perish but have eternal life. . .***

***Come to Me, all you who are laboring, and I will give you rest. . .Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the reign of heaven is theirs!* Red and yellow, black and white—all are precious in His sight.**

**And third, the reality of the power and efficacy of the Word of God is this: *the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable are His ways.* Nothing in this world belongs to us; the whole world is God’s. He is sole Owner and sole Landlord. The Word of God is**

**PENTECOST—page 4**

**shared with everyone because God leaves not one person out of His desire for salvation. Jesus paid the penalty for every sin of every human person, not just for those who would become believers. The Word is proclaimed and planted home to people everywhere of every language, geography, ethnic group, skin color, or religion regardless of whether they like it or like it not. There is only one breed of human being, and it is a race 100% conceived and born into sin, a race absolutely 100% condemned. Except for the Sower. He came here and among us He lived, He died, He rose from the dead, He went back to heaven from where He established His Church, and until the end of time here on earth He continues His sowing.**

**Many people reject Him and His Word, and the mystery still somewhat remains. It is not God’s will that any should perish. His sowing the seed everywhere is not a tease. It is a genuine offer, free of charge. It is a harsh reality that is always going to be hard for us to accept. It causes God the deepest hurt and grief generation after generation. For reasons obvious and simple in some cases to extremely complex in others, and yet in others to just plain unknown, the road to hell is paved daily throughout history. God’s Word assures us they are not elected or predestined for this. And they are not lost because they were sinners, or were guilty of more serious sins than us. We can only commend it all to God, in faith; fearing, loving, and trusting in Him alone.**

**For the hearts that receive the Word, the greatest joy is in knowing that God has planted in us His free gift of faith, which alone is what enables us to receive His Son and His truths. Our hearts can be just as hard, rocky, and thorny as anyone’s, but faith is the new and rich soil in us that works by the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit through the Word to take root, grow, and produce God-pleasing fruits.**

**And through all the challenges we will face in this world, including the anxiety and grief of this mystery of God’s love and power in the reality of the erring and the lost, this God-given faith clings especially to the great promise and assurance of this Word:**

***As the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return there, but***

***water 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;***

**(and you and I saw and heard the mouth of God. . .on the cross. . . *Father,***

***forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*) . . . *MY WORD shall***

***not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose.***

[Reverend William R. Marler, the Sixth Sunday After Pentecost, *anno Domini*, 2020]



****

****