

Kirkwall Presbyterian Church
'Parable of the Sower'
Mark 4:1-20; John 1:1-5,10-14
July 19, 2026
By Keith Marcy

The setting: Shore of Lake Galilee. Crowds have come to see Jesus. No doubt, they have brought their sick, crippled and blind with them from all the surrounding villages. The One who quoted a prophecy about Himself, *"The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear; the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of Me."* (Matthew 11:5-6) is travelling through. Today the good news is going to be preached to the poor. When Jesus healed people, it was marvelous. Their destiny was changed for the rest of their earthly lives – 10 years, 30 years, 50 or 60 years. But if they heard and responded to the Good News, their destiny was changed for eternity.

Today, Jesus is teaching the good news using a parable.

He is seated in a boat; the people stand on shore. The water acts as a natural amplifier.

Jesus often used agricultural stories as illustrations. The methods of farming 2,000 years ago were very different from ours. Shepherds lived a nomadic lifestyle among the hills of Palestine. Those who grew crops lived in a village and walked out to an irregular shaped plot of ground to till and plant and harvest. Foot paths ran everywhere. All operations were labour intensive. The sower carried a bag of seeds on his shoulder, scattering the seed with his hands as he walked. Almost everyone in Jesus audience this day could understand the story from a physical point of view. Jesus' intention, however, was for them to glean a spiritual lesson from this familiar story. This is where most missed the point. They missed it because they did not grasp the key. Almost every parable has a key. Let's look for the key. You will find it helpful if you open your Bibles to Mark 4. Beth read the parable and the explanation Jesus gave His disciples later. We are going to look at both simultaneously.

Verse 3. Jesus begins with a command, *"Listen. A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up."*

Look across the page now to verse 14. *"The farmer sows the Word."* There is the key. 5 words so necessary to an understanding of the spiritual message Jesus conveys through this story. *"The farmer sows the Word."* What does the 'Word' refer to? It is from the same Greek word that we find in John 14, *"In the beginning was the Word and*

the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Later in John 1:14 we read that this *“One who was present in the beginning, who was with God and who was God, became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen His glory. He is the Son who came down from the Father with grace and truth.”* He, Jesus, is the one represented by the seed in the story. It is the message of Him that is spread before the people.

What happened? Verse 15: some people are like seeds along the path, where the Word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the Word that was sown in their hearts so they cannot believe and be saved (Luke 8).

Why could Satan do that? How could he rob a person of eternal life?

Because **they** let him.

Think of the seed on the path for a moment. For many, it was only dry, hard kernels and they trampled on it. But suppose some old woman came along with her broom and exclaimed, *“There is life in that seed. Life, if it has a chance.”* And she swept it off the path into fertile soil so it would grow to produce a crop. Satan was able to snatch the Word from the heart of a person because the person did not recognize the ability of that Word, Jesus, to transform their lives, to make them a child of the King and one of His heirs so they gave Him no chance to take root and change them, and they missed their day of visitation.

If you have heard the message, the Gospel, the good news of Jesus, do not treat it as worthless because Satan is waiting – just waiting to relieve you of it and let you go on with life – forever lost.

Look back to verse 5. *“Some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up the plants were scorched and they withered because they had no root.”*

Look at verse 18: *“Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the Word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, [Christ], they quickly fall away.”*

It often happens when they realize the Christian life is not one of trouble-free, carefree ease. The Christian life comes with trials, disappointments and heartache. And so, they turn back, leaving an empty pew, a disappointed preacher and a glorious future. They have been excited to hear about Jesus; the miracles He performed were awesome. But they failed to dig into the Scriptures; they did not cement the truth into their hearts by confirming that Jesus was fulfilling the plan of God to save a people for eternity. Soon they turned aside, back to their former lifestyle because they did not believe Jesus had to die that they might live.

There are others. Those who hang on a bit longer. Look at verse 7. *“Other seed fell among thorns which grew up and choked the plants so that they did not bear grain.”*

Jesus’ explanation is in verse 18: *“Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the Word, but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things came in and choked the Word making it unfruitful.”*

These people have taken their eyes off the finish line and they lose the race because they forgot the goal; or the plowman, when making the opening split, for two seconds takes his eyes off the stake at the end of his or her land, and the wave left in the furrow behind costs them a point – perhaps the winning point. The writer of the book of Hebrews gives us this word of advice: *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising its shame and sat down at the right hand of God.”*

Mission accomplished!!

Keep your eyes on Him, lest the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desire for other things rob you of the joy of finishing the race well.

My Grandma Coverdale lived with many worries. Her eldest son suffered from a mental condition. When he was a baby, he had two serious illnesses at the same time. The persistent high fever did some brain damage that resulted in challenging behaviour. Grandma suffered from chronic asthma that required frequent house calls from her doctor. Every time they had saved a bit of money, she got ill and the money went for doctor’s bills and medicine. Yet, she kept her faith. She led a young people’s group in this church. Ken and Arnold Hood were students in that group. Ken often related to me how Mrs. Coverdale and her helper, Mrs. Watson, faithfully taught the Scriptures to them. Grandma was not a person who lost her faith because of worries and a hunger for money that the parable talks about. May we be like her.

Verse 8 describes some people in the parable:

“Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying 30, 60 or 100 times.”

Jesus’ explanation in verse 20: *“Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the Word, accept it and produce a crop, 30, 60 or 100 times what was sown.”*

This does not happen automatically. It takes effort. Consider a plant. When the seed falls in good moist soil, it sprouts and comes through the ground in a matter of days. But then there is often a pause in what we see, but below ground the plant is sending roots deeper into the soil. It is hard work, but the plant is preparing for the future. And so, when a drought comes, there is a root system adequate to gather moisture and

nutrients. But the drought may be severe, so every day to conserve and preserve itself, the leaves curl or wilt. It happens to us. Trials come to test us, but if through study we have grown in our faith, we have put down roots based on Scriptural facts—not merely on emotion. Therefore, we have the resources to hang on. Oh, we may wilt, we might restrict our activity, we may feel useless, but we are preserving what we have so that, when the trial has passed, we carry on, stronger than ever to understand and help others in their trials.

What do we do to grow in our faith?

1. We read, study and meditate on God's Word.
2. We attend a Bible believing church regularly where we should be encouraged by other believers, and where we can encourage others – not insult or belittle them or criticize, but to be a positive influence, a source of strength– leading them closer to the One from whom all blessings flow—Jesus of Nazareth!

Prayer:

O Lord, may we be a community of Believers who support each other during the dark times in which we live in order that someone will be strengthened in their faith to bring You the praise and the glory You richly deserve. Help us to be people who produce a rich harvest for our Lord!!!