

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth  
Sunday, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023  
Rev. Gerry Gallant

The Sower, The Seed, and The Soil  
Proper 10  
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

### Welcome

### Announcements

### Call to Worship

Let us worship God, our light, and our salvation.

**The Lord is the stronghold of our lives.**

We desire to live in God's house  
**and to seek God in his holy temple.**

We have come with shouts of joy,  
**to sing and to make music to the Lord.**

Let us worship God in spirit and in truth.  
**Teach us your ways and make straight our paths  
in this hour of worship and always.**

### Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Loving God, we have gathered to meet you.

We have come to listen to you,

to seek you, to worship you.

You are the beginning of all things,

the life of all things; you knew us before we were born.

All knowing Father, you are here and everywhere,  
around us and within us; you know our inmost thoughts.

In you we hope; in you we live.

You are the source of serenity,  
giving peace that is beyond our understanding.

We pray for your presence in our worship and in our lives

In the name of your Son, Our Lord,

Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

**Opening Hymn: “What a friend We Have in Jesus”**

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
 All our sins and griefs to bear!  
 What a privilege to carry  
 Everything to God in prayer!  
 O what peace we often forfeit,  
 O what needless pain we bear,  
 All because we do not carry  
 Everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials or temptations?  
 Is there trouble anywhere?  
 We should never be discouraged;  
 Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
 Can we find a friend so faithful  
 Who will all our sorrows share?  
 Jesus knows our every weakness;  
 Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,  
 Cumbered with a load of care?  
 Christ the Saviour is our refuge;  
 Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
 Do our friends despise, forsake us?  
 Are we tempted to despair?  
 Jesus' strength will shield our weakness,  
 And we'll find new courage there.

**Call to Confession**

Prepare the way of the Lord!  
 Let us make our confession to God.

**Prayer of Confession**

**Holy and merciful God,  
 in your presence we confess  
 our sinfulness, our shortcomings,  
 and our offenses against you.  
 You alone know how often we have sinned  
 in wandering from your ways,  
 in wasting your gifts,  
 in forgetting your love.  
 Have mercy on us, O Lord,  
 for we are ashamed and sorry**

for all we have done to displease you.  
 Forgive our sins,  
 and help us to live in your light  
 and walk in your ways,  
 for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

### Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news!  
 There is no condemnation  
 for those who are in Christ Jesus.  
 For the law of the Spirit  
 of life in Christ Jesus  
 has set you free from the law of sin and death.  
 Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.  
 The old life has gone;  
 a new life has begun.

### The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
 Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
 Give us this day our daily bread.  
 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.  
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,  
 Forever and ever. Amen.**

### Responsive Reading

#### Isaiah 55:10-13

<sup>10</sup> "For as the rain and the 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,  
<sup>11</sup> **so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
 it shall not return to me empty,  
 but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
 and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.**

<sup>12</sup> "For you shall go out in joy  
 and be led forth in peace;  
 the mountains and the hills before you  
 shall break forth into singing,

and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.  
**<sup>13</sup> Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;  
 instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;  
 and it shall make a name for the LORD,  
 an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."**

**Children's Hymn: "God Sees the Little Sparrow Fall"**

God sees the little sparrow fall,  
 it meets His tender view;  
 If God so loves the little birds,  
 I know He loves me too.

He loves me too, He loves me too,  
 I know He loves me too;  
 Because He loves the little things,  
 I know He loves me too.

He paints the lily of the field,  
 Perfumes each lily bell;  
 If He so loves the little flowers,  
 I know He loves me well.

He loves me too, He loves me too,  
 I know He loves me too;  
 Because He loves the little things,  
 I know He loves me too.

God made the little birds and flowers,  
 And all things large and small;  
 He'll not forget His little ones,  
 I know He loves them all.

He loves me too, He loves me too,  
 I know He loves me too;  
 Because He loves the little things,  
 I know He loves me too.

**Children's Lesson**

**Prayer for illumination**  
**(Congregant Prepared)**

## Scripture

### Matthew 13:1-9 & 18-23

**13** That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. <sup>2</sup> And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. <sup>3</sup> And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. <sup>5</sup> 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, <sup>6</sup> but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup> Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup> Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup> He who has ears, let him hear.”

<sup>18</sup> “Hear then the parable of the sower: <sup>19</sup> 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 path. <sup>20</sup> As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, <sup>21</sup> yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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.”

## Sermon

The Parable of the Sower is a well-known parable. It tells the story of a man planting his crops and the harvest that he can expect to reap based upon his plantings. This would have been something which many of the rural Palestinians would have been familiar with as many of them would have planted their own crops and gathered their own harvests.

Jesus is using this familiarity to explain how the kingdom of God is spread in the world. There are three key components involved in the parable: the Sower, the seed, and the soil.

The seed is the word of God. We know this because Jesus tells us so in the parallel scripture from Luke.

### Luke 8:11

<sup>11</sup> Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

What is important for us to understand about the seed is that it is meant to produce something. The Word of God is meant to have an effect in the lives of those it is shared with in a variety of ways often referred to as the Fruit of the Spirit.

However, just like in the real world the seed cannot spread itself, which is why we need the Sower, the person who is responsible for spreading the seed so that the fruit of the harvest can eventually be harvested. This is not just a preacher or a pastor, this is everyone who claims to be a Christian, through carrying out the Great Commission we are spreading the seed of God's Word.

There is something important for us to understand about the Sower. In ancient Palestine when the fields were sown, the Sower deliberately sowed the seed all over his land, including over the paths that he walked while planting, in the rocky places along the path and even among the thorn and weed covered ground, not just on the good soil in his land. This is something we all need to know, we are all called to spread the Word of God everywhere we go, not just to people we think would be receptive. We need to share the Word of God with everyone and everywhere, just like the Sower in the parable.

However, the real focus of this parable is meant to be a lesson for the Sower about the soil. Even the best Sower, with the very best seed in the world, will never have a good harvest unless the seed that he casts results in fruits.

What is interesting is that even though we learn of four different soils, and there is no harvest from three of those soils, however that soil is the human heart, which we know is capable of change through the power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. This is why as the Sower it is so important that we sow the seed on all types of soil, to all kinds of people.

The parable calls to our attention that even though the soil is not productive for a variety of reasons, it is always capable of producing fruit. This means that change is possible, the reception of the Word of God is possible even in the most hardened of hearts.

Because the effectiveness of the Word of God is dependent on the state of the heart, Jesus explains how the heart may be hindered from reception of the Word by the things of this world in this parable.

A lot of Christians feel that this parable only applies to the spreading of the Gospel, however if most Christians were to explore their own hearts on a day-by-day basis, they may find that their own hearts experience all of these different kinds of soil in their own response to the Word of God in their lives. There may be times when we are unreceptive to God's Word, and other times where we readily accept and live our lives according to the Word of God.

Remember that the seed, the Word of God is meant to produce the Fruit of the Spirit, and in many people who are Christian, the Word is not producing as much fruit as it should because they may be letting it fall onto the unfertile soils in their own hearts.

So, let's take a look at the different kinds of soil in this parable and what they mean in the lives of believers.

First let's look at the seeds that fall along the path, on that hard packed soil. It was common to see pathways run alongside and sometime through fields in the region. Most of the seed that fell along the pathway was either trampled down by people who walked along them, or eaten by the birds who saw it as a quick and easy place to get fed.

The problem is that seeds could not penetrate into the hard soil, it lacked all of the things that they needed to survive. The hard packed path lacked water, air, and all the other nutrients that the seed needs to take root and to grow.

The hardened heart has no room for the Word of God. This is why we are told that Satan can come along quickly and remove the Word from the heart, in the same way that the birds could follow behind the Sower and feast on the seed he tossed on the hardened ground. Some people experience no change, no Fruit of the Spirit, because the devil removes God's Word from them and their lives.

However, there is a bit of Old Testament Scripture which is important for us to take note of before we give up hope on the hardened paths of people's hearts.

Hosea 10:12 says,

**Hosea 10:12**

**12 Sow for yourselves righteousness;  
reap steadfast love;  
break up your fallow ground,  
for it is the time to seek the LORD,  
that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.**

The Israelites went through times of being faithful to God and his Word and times of being cold to God and his Word. This is a reminder that even though your heart may be hardened fallow ground, unused fields, it can be broken up and utilized to produce fruit if the Sower is willing to put the work into the field.

So, despite the hardness of people's hearts, it is not as hopeless as it is sometimes painted. Something can be done to break up the hardened soil of fallow fields and paths. Something can be done or happen to get the Gospel message through the hardened crust into the soil in which the seed can take root.

What is it that can break up the crust on the surface of this hardened path? Sometimes it is a single event that takes place in a person's life that breaks them and makes them realize the

necessity of God in their lives. For others it is a long-drawn-out process in which the hardened crust is worn away little by little until the seed can finally find root.

The truth is that if you go to visit the mountains you can sometimes find a tree growing out in the middle of nowhere that has somehow found a way to get root in the rocky side of a mountain. In the human heart this can only happen by the power of the Holy Spirit which brings these hardened people to the place where God's Word takes root in their lives.

In non-Christians we often see this hardened soil of a heart in three ways. The unreasonable heart: the heart that is hardened and the mind that is closed to the Gospel. They simply refuse to engage the Word of God in any way in their lives. The undiscerning heart: They might be willing to listen to the Word of God or to engage in talk with Christians, however it makes no sense to them. Finally, there is the uninterested heart: They have no real interest in the Word of God or religion in general. They are much more interested in worldly pursuits; the Bible and church are just boring or dull to them.

In Christians we too sometimes harden our hearts to God's Word, especially when it speaks about something which we do not want to acknowledge as a truth in our lives. Sometimes we turn cold against the Word of God because it asks us to do something we are not comfortable doing or asks us to stop doing something that we enjoy doing.

When our heart is cold to God's Word the Devil will quickly come along and try to take away the Word of God and its ability to change our lives. He will try to convince us it is ok to miss service, after all it's just church, he will try to convince us that our sin is justified or not really a sin at all, because by doing so he knows he is preventing that seed from taking root in our lives. This is why we need to be receptive to the Word of God, but the things we like and the things we do not like, so that all of the seed may find root in our lives and turn us into the people that God is calling for us to be. It is up to us to plow the fallow ground in our lives and to receive God's Word fully into our lives.

Next, we have the rocky soil. A seed can often set roots in rocky soil, but those roots are shallow and the plant that grows out of it does not live long. The plant will die when it faces a strong storm as it is uprooted from the soil quickly.

In humans this is because the Word of God finds quick root, and might even show growth, but it dies as the interest wanes or is drawn away by other things. There are many rocky ground Christians, Christians that come to Christ in an emotional response. However, they never really seek to get to know God any better.

In today's culture these are often the people who come to Christ at concerts, crusades, and revivals. People who get caught up in the event and receive the Word of God in a way that touches them emotionally. They love the idea that God is love, but that is as far as they want to go. They hear of God's salvation and of eternal life and they think 'yes I want that' but the



second that the teachings go a little deeper and speak of repentance and change they are no longer interested in adhering to the faith.

These rocky soil Christians may be faithful church members for a long time, but the minute that something in the Gospel offends them they quit going to church, they quit living in the Word of God, and the sun beats down on the seedling and withers it up, sucking all of the water and life out of it, because it has no roots from which to draw the living water.

As Christians we need to be aware that sometimes our own hearts can become like the rocky soil. We might be passionate about living according to God's Word, but at the first sign of persecution, or the first sign of trial or the first sign of failure we give up and go back to living how we were before. Many Christians walk away from a good Bible study, discipleship class or sermon thinking, 'I need to change my life' and then nothing ever changes in their lives because it took no root in their lives.

We need to be willing to stick firm to the decision to change our lives through all the season of our lives, giving the seed, the Word of God the chance to put down strong roots in our lives. Maybe that means we need to remove some of the rocks ourselves, take away the things which make it difficult to obey God in our lives. Maybe we just need to establish good habits like prayer and reading the Scripture that will water the Word and allow its roots to grow and spread deeper into our lives.

The third soil is thorny soil. This soil has depth, water, and nutrients and because of these things being present the seed can set its roots; however, many other things are also growing in this soil, weeds of all sorts. And it is not the sun that causes the seed to die in this soil, instead it is all of the weeds that surround the seed and steal the nutrients that it needs to thrive.

In non-Christians and Christians alike this soil, this kind of heart is often one that embraces the idea of God and all of the blessings that he brings into their life. However, the things of this world draw them away from spiritual maturity, it chokes out their spiritual life. This thorny soil, or sin filled heart, is often embracing God and faithfulness on Sunday, and then embracing worldly pursuits and pleasure the rest of the week.

This thorny soil is closely associated with the one we spoke of last week, people who have heard the Gospel and are still denying God in their lives. Although they might see times of spiritual growth, times of the Fruit of the Spirit, the majority of their life is filled with non-spiritual, non-fruitful pursuit and accomplishments.

Hebrews 6:7-8 says.

**Hebrews 6:7-8**

**<sup>7</sup> For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. <sup>8</sup> But if it bears**

**thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.**

Christians this is a reminder that at times our hearts can be like the thorny ground, there are times in our lives when worries and troubles or pleasurable pursuits will distract us from the word of God, and it is at these times that we need to remember the importance of the Word in our lives.

Like with the rocky ground, when we have a thorny heart, we need to be willing to do some weeding in our lives, removing the sins, great and small, that distract us from God and by doing so create a better soil in which the Fruits of the Spirit may flourish in our lives.

Which brings us to the good soil. This is a soil in which there is enough depth, enough water, and enough nutrients. Notice that it does not say that this soil is completely free of the weeds and thorns that would choke out the seed, instead it is a soil that is being regularly cultivated by the Sower, so that the seed has the best chance to make strong roots, grow and produce a bountiful harvest of fruits.

The key to this type of heart is that it is receptive to the Word of God. I have heard it described as a prepared heart: one in which the ground has been plowed and the rocks and weeds are being removed regularly. A heart that is constantly preparing itself to repent and walk in the ways of the Lord. It is a preceptive heart: it prays for the Holy Spirit to help it understand the Word of God and this means it makes an effort to study the Word alone and in fellowship. Finally, it is a productive heart: it bears fruit not only in the life of itself, but in the lives of others as it carries out the Great Commission, showing the love of Christ to everyone that it interacts with.

For Christians this is an important task, to keep our hearts in this condition, prepared, preceptive, and productive. This means we cannot stay away from church for weeks at a time, or we cannot just pick up the faith when we feel like it. Just like farming, our faith is work and we need to be up early doing the chores to ensure that we have fields in which the seed will take root.

So, what do we learn from this parable:

The Sower is doing his job, spreading the seed everywhere, regardless of where he thinks it will grow or not, because it is his job to spread the seed.

The seed is doing its job, it is the perfect Word of God and regardless of where it is cast by the Sower it is trying to take root, trying to grow, and trying to produce the Fruit of the Spirit.

The real issue lies in the soil, the heart of those who are exposed to the Word of God. Whether a Christian or non-Christian they can all be in different stages of soil. There are some that will be like hard packed earth, others that are filled with rocks and still others with weeds and

thorns. These will all eventually kill the plant that grows from the seed and never really produce the Fruits of the Spirit.

However, we do not need to give up hope, because nothing is impossible for God. Through the power of the Holy Spirit even the hardest soil can be broken, the largest rocks removed, the weeds and thorns cast aside, and good productive soil can be found in which the seed will flourish and produced a harvest that can be thirty, sixty or even hundredfold.

Let us pray,

**Obligation to Others**

O Lord, our Savior,  
 you have warned us that you will require much  
 of those to whom much is given.  
 Grant that we who have so great a heritage  
 may strive together more abundantly  
 to extend to others what we so richly enjoy.  
 As we have supported the labors of others,  
 by working with them,  
 in their turn others may support us in our work,  
 to the fulfillment of your holy will;  
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*Source: Augustine of Hippo*

**Hymn: "Glorify Thy Name"**

Father, I love you  
 I praise you and adore you  
 Glorify thy name in all the earth

Glorify thy name  
 Glorify thy name  
 Glorify thy name in all the earth

Jesus, I love you  
 I praise you and adore you  
 Glorify thy name in all the earth

Glorify thy name  
 Glorify thy name  
 Glorify thy name in all the earth

Spirit, I love you  
 I praise you and adore you  
 Glorify thy name in all the earth

Glorify thy name  
 Glorify thy name  
 Glorify thy name in all the earth  
 Glorify thy name in all the earth

### **Invitation to Offering**

#### **Offering**

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

**E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. [standrewsperthoffering@gmail.com](mailto:standrewsperthoffering@gmail.com) If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.**

#### **Offertory Prayer**

##### **(Congregant Prepared)**

#### **Closing Hymn: "In the Garden"**

I come to the garden alone  
 While the dew is still on the roses  
 And the voice I hear, falling on my ear  
 The Son of God discloses

And He walks with me  
 And He talks with me  
 And He tells me I am His own  
 And the joy we share as we tarry there  
 None other has ever known

He speaks and the sound of His voice  
 Is so sweet the birds hush their singing  
 And the melody that He gave to me  
 Within my heart is ringing

And He walks with me  
 He talks with me  
 And He tells me I am His own  
 And the joy we share as we tarry there  
 None other has ever known

And the joy we share as we tarry there  
 None other has ever known

### **Pastoral Prayer**

We praise you, God our creator, for your handiwork  
 in shaping and sustaining your wondrous creation.  
 We especially thank you for  
 the miracle of life and the wonder of living . . .  
 particular blessings coming to us our days . . .  
 the resources of the earth . . .  
 gifts of creative vision and skillful craft . . .  
 the treasure stored in every human life. . . .

We pray for others, God our Savior,  
 claiming your love in Jesus Christ for the whole world  
 and committing ourselves to care for those around us in his name.  
 We especially pray for  
 those who work for the benefit of others . . .  
 those who cannot work today . . .  
 those who teach and those who learn . . .  
 people who are poor . . .  
 the church in persecution. . . .

God our creator,  
 yours is the morning, and yours is the evening.  
 Let Christ, the sun of righteousness,  
 shine forever in our hearts  
 and draw us to the light of your radiant glory.  
 We ask this for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Redeemer. **Amen.**

### **Benediction**

May the blessing of God,  
 the giver of every good and perfect gift;  
 and of Christ, who summons us to service;  
 and of the Holy Spirit, who inspires generosity and love,  
 be with us all.