

June 19<sup>th</sup> through the 23<sup>rd</sup> I took some of our Junior Highers on a mission trip to Minneapolis. We stayed at a church in the Phillips neighborhood, and we did work in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Our very first day we had a quick tour of the church, and then loaded into our cars and drove to St. Paul to a community garden. We spent *hours* weeding 12 different raised gardens. I was so proud of our Jr. Highers, they were becoming tiny little farmers. The next day we split into two groups and went to two different community gardens. That days task was planting.

Our community garden expert, her name was Kim, told us that we were going to be planting carrots, and that carrot seeds are particularly small so we had to be extra careful not to drop them, or put too many seeds in one part of the ground. She got down on her hands and knees and showed us how to plant them. We'd take our index finger and press gently into the dirt, creating a hole less than an inch deep, and put one carrot seed into the ground. We'd space each of the holes 1 inch apart, and continue to plant for a stretch of about 25 feet. We had 3 rows to plant, each row had 2 lines to plant. That's 150 feet of planting. If we were planting each seed 1 inch from the other, and we were planting 150 feet, that means we were planting 1,800 carrot seeds in the ground!

There was no shade in the garden, so it could get pretty hot. We took plenty of water breaks, and we rotated around since there were a few other jobs we had to do; watering and weeding and what not. After 2 days of weeding and planting, I think our students were pretty much done with gardening. Gardening is tough work, and it is tedious work, and you never know what you're going to get after you plant.

In the parable that Jesus told we find a sower scattering seed carelessly in the field. Some

lands in the field, while other lands on the path, in the rocks and among thorns. Depending on where the seeds are, they have a different response to how they grow, if at all.

This morning I want to take a look at Jesus' explanation of the parable, and compare it to our own lives. We're human, so our lives aren't always "the good soil;" so what does it look like when our lives are the different kinds of soil? And then I want to look at the parable as if we are the sower. God calls us to tell other people about Christ, but what is that supposed to look like? So let's get started.

Jesus explains the parable in laymen's terms to his disciples, telling them exactly what it was that he meant by the story. The seed that fell on the path are like those that hear the word, but the enemy, like the birds, comes and snatches it away before it can take root. The enemy is crafty, and scripture tells us that the devil's native language is lies. The devil speaks lies fluently. There have been times in my life, and maybe yours as well, when I heard different promises from God, but I too quickly believe the lies instead of the promise.

It's important to note here that no matter what, even if I am currently buying into the lies, the Holy Spirit is still at work with the seed that has been planted. No matter what condition we are in, the Spirit is still at work and can make any seed grow.

The next explanation is for the seed that falls on rocky ground. Jesus says that the person immediately receives it with joy, but as soon as trouble and persecution comes their way they stumble or fall away. Maybe you can relate to this one, I know that I can. When tough stuff happens in my life it is easy for me to start to doubt and question. It's easy for me to get upset and to shrug off my faith.

A great example is the story of Peter on the night of Jesus' betrayal when he denies Jesus three times. It was a scary time to be a follower of Christ, and a few different people recognized Peter. "Hey, aren't you one of Jesus' disciples?" they'd ask. "No, I've never met the man. I swear!" he'd say. The heat of persecution can be difficult to endure, even for Peter. Maybe you've experienced heat like that, when being a Christian is unpopular. Maybe you've experienced that around your friends, neighbors, coworkers...maybe even your family.

But again we see that the Holy Spirit is at work. Even though Peter found himself on rocky soil and denied Christ when the heat of persecution came down, the Holy Spirit was still at work and Peter still became the rock that the church was built on...just like Jesus promised.

As for the seed sown among thorns, Jesus says, they're the people who hear the word but the cares of the world are too great! He mentions the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth. These are the things that we desire, our aspirations and worldly longings. Things like popularity, the need to be right, the desire to be respected, feared, known, and revered. The cares of wealth beg questions like, "Am I making enough? Are they paying me what I deserve? Am I making more than my spouse? My neighbor? My incompetent coworker? My sibling? My parent? My kid?" Worldly desires and cares build up more and more every day. Marketing pays out hundreds of billions of dollars every year, and with each dollar spent is another point of pressure in our lives.

There is another story from the Bible where a rich young man asks Jesus how to achieve eternal life, and Jesus responds by saying that he must sell all of his possessions and give them to the poor. It says that he left sad because he had much. Many of us have experienced a time when the pressures of the world have crept in, choking out the sun. Maybe you remember my sermon

from a few weeks back on humility...I think that the seeds that are amongst the thorns are seeds that are focused inward, just like the young rich man who looked at himself rather than others.

Even when the cares of the world are great, the Holy Spirit is at work. Even when we find ourselves in the thorns, the Spirit is still watering and feeding that seed so it can grow.

Lastly, Jesus tells us that the seed sown on good soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, and who doesn't let the persecution overshadow them, the cares overwhelm them, or the enemy to steal it away. They understand the word and let it cultivate fruit within them, yielding a harvest. These are the times in our lives where the stars align and we are willing vessels to be used by God. These are times when we are praying, reading our Bibles, showing up to church, serving others, giving and tithing, or keeping in touch with our Christian friends; they are times when we are chasing after God just like God chases after us. As people of faith each of us has had these moments in our life, too. We've all experienced the grace and peace of Christ in our lives. And God has worked in us and through us to bring us where we are today.

At any point in time we might find ourselves in a position of any one of those descriptions of soil. However, we have faith in the Holy Spirit to cultivate the seed planted in us. It's up to the Holy Spirit how that seed will grow. And the Holy Spirit will move in and through us despite the current conditions of our soil.

**NOW**, what if we put ourselves in the shoes of the sower? What can we learn? If you remember the beginning of my sermon I talked about our junior high students weeding and planting in community gardens. Remember how meticulously we planted the carrot seeds? We didn't scatter the seeds carelessly into a field and around it; but God's way of gardening is different. In the parable we find a sower who is carelessly tossing seed around in his field, which

is exactly the type of seed sowing that God wants us to do. BUT, God wants us to care for each individual seed meticulously, no matter the kind of soil it is planted on. That means we won't be practicing street corner evangelism, but we will get to know them on a deeper level and share the good news of Christ with them.

So it doesn't matter who they people are, where they are from, where they are going or what they have done, the Word of God is for them! God calls us to be careless, unmethodical and nondiscriminatory when spreading the Word of God, and paradoxically to care deeply and meticulously for all those to whom we spread God's word. It isn't for us to decide who the right kind of soil is and how we think they will grow; it's up to the Holy Spirit.

When I was a kid, growing up in youth group, my parents were really involved. At one of the planning meetings the youth pastor and volunteers were trying to figure out how to get the students closer to God. I think pretty highly of my parents, and in that meeting my mom coined a phrase that has stuck with me for a long time. She said, "Remember, we're not Holy Spirit Jr." It's not up to us who deserves to hear the Word of God, or what kind of fruit we think people will yield. It's up to us to spread the Word wherever we can, just as it has been spread in our lives...but it is not up to us how the seed grows.

John 3:8 says, "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." The Holy Spirit is a great mystery!

No matter the soil, in our own lives or in others, we know that God is at work. We know that the Spirit is cultivating the seeds that have been planted, and we pray that the seed grows. We pray that the seed grows in the lives of our loved ones, in the lives of our neighbors, in the

lives of strangers, in the lives of our enemies, in the lives of dear friends, in the lives of our leaders, and in the lives of all who have had the seed planted.

Join me in a word of prayer. Almighty God, we thank you for planting in us the seed of your word. By your Holy Spirit help us to receive it with joy, live according to it, and grow in faith and hope and love. Help us to respond by scattering the seed of your word wherever we go, and in whatever we do. Protect us from the enemy who tries to steal it away, help it to take root in our lives so it doesn't wither at the heat of persecution, and keep it far from the thorns that are the cares of the world. It is in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, that we pray. Amen.