

Today's scripture reading brings us to the parable of the sower once more. I preached on this scripture a few short months ago when the Alma Choir was visiting us. That was a wonderful day in the life of our church, and if you compare my sermon today, to the sermon then you will find two very different sermons.

When we read scripture, especially parables, we often find multiple messages inside and it is up to us the reader to decide which messages to carry. Sometimes we only find one, sometimes we find many, and when you are preaching it is wise to stick to one or two messages so they might be heard.

So let's dive in to this scripture reading once more. Jesus is on a boat because he has such a crowd around him that he requires the acoustical assistance of the water to carry his words to everyone who is gathered to listen. If you didn't know, that's why speakers stood on boats. Jesus tells them "many things" we are told but among these things was this parable. The story of a farmer going out to sow some seeds in his field.

There are four types of seed that grow in this story. The first is the seed fallen on the path, and the birds scoop up the seed. The second is seed falling where soil is rocky and while it grows fast it burns up in the heat of the sun because it's roots are shallow. The third seed falls among thorny plants and are choked out by these weeds. The last one falls on fertile soil and has an unexpected yield of one hundred to one, sixty to one, and thirty to one.

Jesus then has a discussion with his disciples and they ask him, "Why do you use parables when you speak to the crowds?" A question that I believe is an important one for us today. I have always felt that Jesus used parables because it allowed for the layering of multiple messages inside of a single story. This would allow him to share the message and word of God more efficiently while spark discussion amongst his followers allowing them to share their faith more openly with each other.

But the scriptural answer is a little more complicated. Jesus says to them because these people, meaning the people on the shore, have not received the secrets of the kingdom of heaven but you have. One could interpret this as him saying the parables are coded messages for you my

disciples, please pay attention. Jesus says that he speaks in parables to the crowds for as they see they do not “see”, and although they hear they do not ‘hear’ or understand.

Given that we are ordinary people and not able to sit with Jesus and discuss his words. This sounds like bad news. It is a terrible message to hear in the scriptures that when we are given the word we might or might not understand it. This is a message that can be taken as horrible news or with a little understanding and reframing, it can be good news.

You see, I think the message here can take some responsibility away from us in our ability to hear God’s word and enact on it. Because Jesus makes clear to the disciples, righteous people, other prophets in fact, have misunderstood God’s message and could not hear what God was saying to them.

Jesus’ message here holds two pieces of good news for me. The first thing I think to take note of in this message from Jesus, is to stay humble. To recognize that even when we are righteous, and we think we have the right message, we may be wrong. We may not have the grip on things that we think we do and the message here is that those moment and feelings are ok because in many ways they are beyond our control.

From a practical standpoint what it means is that when looking at a scripture passage, and looking at God’s will for us in our lives, we need to have flexibility. To understand that our preconceived notions might lead us astray *or* set us on the right path. A willingness to humble ourselves before God, when we approach in prayer or by reading scripture, will help us to see what God wants us to see and hear what God wants us to hear.

Jesus tells us through the parable, that when we are given God’s word it is not always up to us to understand it. So, knowing this, when we come to God in prayer, in reading scripture, and committing ourselves to the path that Christ led us on. We should be prepared, to not always receiving answers to the questions we asked, or receiving answers to the prayers we were hoping for. And in these moments of silence recognizing that God almighty is still with us, is still present, and will continue to be so even when we cannot hear or see God in the way we are hoping.

Which brings me to the second message of our text. We should not blame ourselves when we are struggling to connect with God. When I am trying to find God's word in the scripture, and my first two drafts of a sermon are absolutely rubbish, it is not a moral failing on my part. Sometimes I have rushed into the scripture too quickly, and like a plant in shallow soil my sermon is burned up when I realize it doesn't hold up under scrutiny.

Sometimes searching for a sermon is impossible because the stressors of real life have taken over, and I find myself struggling to create a safe and quiet space to listen to God. There are other days where I begin to formulate the message, am holding it in my mind, and the moment I sit down to type it up it has fully vanished from my memory. Stolen away from me like a bird stealing seed off the road.

And I don't think this experience is limited to myself. I believe that we all struggle in various forms with our faith. Trying to discern God's will, is a monumental task for everyone not just ministers.

What I am trying to say is this. We all struggle sometimes to understand the Bible when we read it, even those of us with seminary training. We all struggle to discern God's will for us. Yet in these moments, I want to assure you this is not a personal failing. It is not an immoral act or a failure to not understand the divine.

I am here to tell you that the good news of the text today is that we hold less control over the revelations given to us than we think. That is good news because it means that God still is in control. It means the Spirit still blows where it wills. And while Jesus' parable would lead us to believe that one in four seeds lands in good soil. I think I have a much lower track record for understanding God's word and plan for me than 25%.

Take with you this good news today. Through remembering our humility and trust in God. Even when our prayers are unanswered, and our way forward is clouded. We know that the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ is still close now and forevermore.

So let us then persevere together, in this life of faith confident in our own forgiveness, and in God's everlasting faithfulness.

This is the word of the Lord, Thanks be to God.

Let's Pray