

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

16th July 2023

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

SEEDS OF GOD'S LOVE

Seeds are amazing things, don't you think? Or, maybe you don't, because like me you don't stop to think about them very much at all! They are so important for life; without them we wouldn't have many of the plants which rely on them to reproduce, plants which we and many other living creatures then rely on for food. And just think about what we do with them: we put them in the ground, and they grow, with something happening inside of them that most of us don't even understand. We may have learnt a bit about it in school, and we may know how to prepare everything to give them the best chance of germinating and growing, but as for the actual biological chemistry of how it all happens, well??? We kind of take for granted our expectation that not only will the seeds we plant grow, but they will produce many more seeds or fruit when they do. I'm always amazed when I plant things like zucchinis, or pumpkins, or watermelons, and how from that one seed comes this large plant which continues to produce so much large fruit over a period of time. Or driving past a farmer's paddock and seeing row upon row of heads of grain each containing so many seeds. When I do stop to think about it, it seems to me that seeds, how they work, what they produce, are an incredible part of Creation we often take for granted.

Jesus showed in His 33 years living on earth that He was many things, and one of them was that He was a great teacher. This is shown in particular in His teaching stories, what we normally call 'parables', in which He took a very normal, everyday, situation that people could relate to, and used it to give us a teaching about God and God's Kingdom which goes deeper and deeper the more we look at it. One of the great examples of this is the parable we have here, often called the Parable of the Sower. In telling this story about the farmer who goes and scatters his seeds, very carelessly it seems to us, Jesus gives us a great and relatable teaching about God's Word and message of love coming to us, and the different ways that we relate to it.

This is one of those stories that when we first hear it begin, we know it so well that our minds can quickly jump forward to what we know is coming next, to what we remember it is about. And most likely

in this case that will mean we start thinking about the four different types of 'soil', which represent our openness and response to God's Word, which are described here. As with many teachings in the Bible, there is always the human temptation to take what is here and apply it in judgement to others: 'oh yes, that applies so well to that person'. But what we are called to do here, as uncomfortable as it can be sometimes, is to use this teaching to examine and change ourselves.

The first seed falls on the path, of course the hard- hearted. It might describe when we just don't have time for God at all, His Word can't begin to have a place in our lives. For us it might also be talking about the times when we don't want to apply God's Word to a particular area of our lives, because we either don't want to stop doing something we are doing, or to start doing something we should be doing. In Jesus' explanation about this kind of ground the devil is specifically mentioned as coming and taking the seed of God's love away from us. When we straight up think we don't need God, or that we know better than God, the devil loves it because it is so easy to take us away.

The seed on the rocky soil, what does it do? It sprouts quickly because shallow soil means the ground warms quickly allowing that process of germination to get right under way. But with no depth to the soil, and therefore no root system, when the harsh sun comes out the young plant quickly withers. What does that look like for us? It might be that we have a great spiritual experience, and there is nothing wrong with that, but if that is all our faith is based on then when the worries, the struggles, the doubts, the hardships, of life come along, if all we are looking to is the glory of the mountain tops our faith won't keep us going through the struggles of the valleys. Jesus had the great glory of the resurrection, but He also went through the suffering of the cross. We are shallow and rocky ground when we just look for God's presence and His blessings in the good things which happen to us and which we go through, and not feelings His love and comfort also with us when times get hard, which they will.

What's next? The ground filled with weeds or thorns. If you have done any kind of gardening at all you know that weeds are those plants that always grow so much better than what you have planted in that ground. In Jesus' story here, the weeds of course grew much quicker than the farmer's seeds, so ended up choking them out. How does that apply to us and our faith? The 'weeds' for us are the temptations which come to us even when our faith is strong; the temptations which promise us quick but shallow

pleasure, an easier way, like the temptation the devil gave Adam and Eve right back in the Garden of Eden they promise us more of what we want. The weeds are also the worries, the fears, the sadness, which comes to us both as individuals or as a group and make us wonder if, despite what we know and have experienced before, there is a better way than staying true to God and His Word in our lives. The weeds are the temptations and enticements, the bright shiny things, from the outside which are trying to pull us away from God, and the fears and doubt from inside which are trying to push us away from Him. Although I think I can apply all four types of soil to my life at different times, I think that, for me personally, this is the one I struggle with the most.

And finally, the good soil. This soil is when our hearts, by the grace of God, are open and receptive to the seed of God's love and what it does in transforming us and our lives. If this soil wasn't who we are, at least for much of the time, we wouldn't be hearing or reading this message now. What does it look like when we are this soil? We are open to God, trusting Him in all we go through, honestly applying what He teaches us to our lives and being open to living that out, seeing His love and care with us in the good and the bad times, not listening to those things from inside or outside of us which try to take us away from Him. God's Word grows in us and produces a yield in transforming our lives and in what we do for Him and for others.

The seed which is sown, God's Word, is the seed of God's love for us. It's the love which is shown in all He has done for us, and in the love, peace, forgiveness, and hope He continues to give to us. It's the love we all need in our lives, and which God, like that seemingly careless farmer, in His grace sends out to all of us. It's the seed of love, which both assures us that God forgives us and now leads and guides us to live our lives in Him.

Often when we look at this parable, this is where we stop, but we can move on to what happens next, what it means for us now. Perhaps not so much today with seeds being so carefully engineered and selected, but in times past after a farmer had harvested his grain he would keep aside from the harvest the seed he needed to plant another crop for the following year. The seed which had been grown was then used to grow more seed. We also become the seed of God's love. In the Bible Jesus is sometimes referred to as the Word, because in who He was, what said, what He did, He revealed who God is to people as He showed

God's love to them. As God's love grows in us, and transforms us in bringing us to Him, we now become those seeds, that word, which take this love out to others. How do we do that? By how we live out our care, our acceptance, our forgiveness. By how the grace we receive is the grace we live and share. There's that old saying which says, 'for many people Christians are the only Bible they will ever read'. We become the Word which is planted in others; what we show them about who God is by the way we act and how we treat others. How does the seed we plant go in showing and sharing God's love?

There is so much we can say about this parable, so much we can learn from it. On its surface it seems so simple and straightforward, and unlike most parables Jesus even gives us an explanation of it, but the more we look at it the deeper it is. But, most importantly, it reminds us that in His grace God's love is sent out to us all, and then asks us to think about how we receive that seed; what kind of soil are we? It also leads us to think about how once we have become part of the harvest, we are also then involved in the sowing. In both of those things we see our human weaknesses and failings, and so we thank God that it is by His work in the Holy Spirit that any harvest happens at all. God help us to be open and receptive to the seeds of His love which He sends out to plant and grow in our lives. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Think about the four different types of soil/ways we receive God into our lives which are described here? Can you think of times or situations when each of these four describes how you respond to God's Word and His love for you?
- In applying these four descriptions to yourself, does that highlight for you any areas in your life in which you struggle to be fully open to both receiving and growing in God? Hand these over and ask for God's help in opening yourself fully to Him.
- What does God's Word and love growing in you look like? How does it come out in your life?
- Think about ways you can now be a 'Sower'; how you can sow the seed of God's love in people who are in your life?

Prayer: thank God that in His grace He spreads the seed of His Word and His love to each one of us. Ask Him help us to be receptive and open to receiving Him into our lives fully, and to be 'Sowers' also now in what we say and do.

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