

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

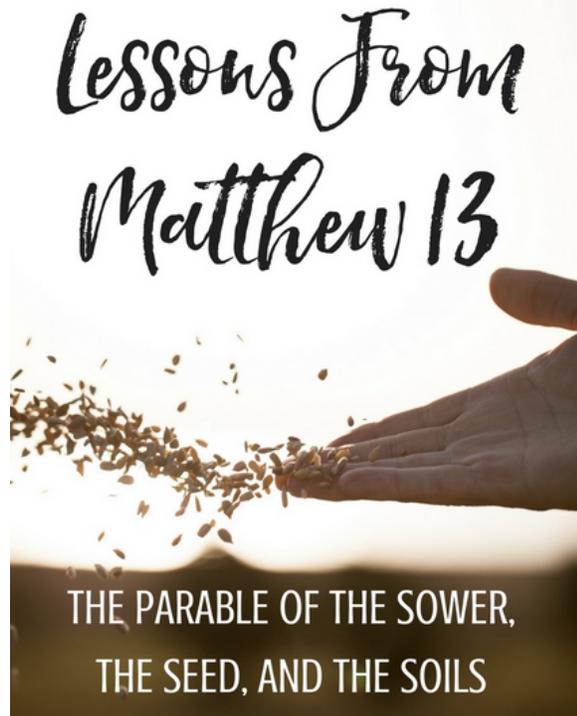
Cycle A, 7.12.20

Isaiah 55:10-11/Romans 8:18-23/

Matthew 13:1-23

**THE LIBERATING AWARENESS
OF GOD'S SAVING WORD**

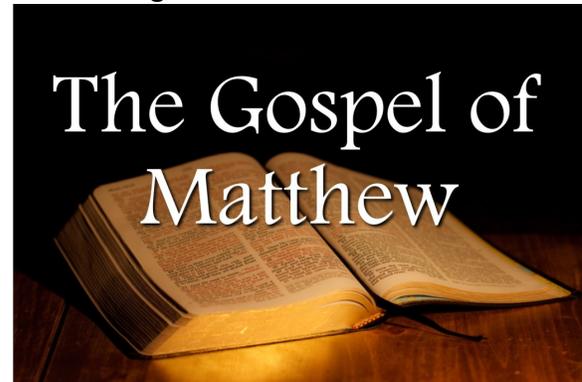
The parable of the Sower is, perhaps, the archetypal parable. Certainly, the Gospel writers must have thought so, since they took pains to explain it in the verses following the parable itself. For those of us who are regular church goers, I think it is safe to say that we have heard this Gospel read and preached on almost as many times as we have years in this world.



We understand that God is the sower and that the seed represents the Word of God. We understand the extravagant love with which God scatters this seed everywhere. We understand that the different kinds of ground represent people and the differing degrees with which they are able to receive God's Word. And, because we are regular churchgoers, we tend to see ourselves as

the rich soil in which God's word was able to take hold. We often think of and lament those whom we know who are the rocky, thorny, weed choked soil who have fallen away from faith and the Church for any number of reasons.

What we may not understand or reflect on when we hear this Gospel reading is just what that word is that is being thrown around in such abundance. We hear the Sunday readings in isolation, out of the context in which they are set. The Gospels were meant to be read from start to finish and, in order to fully understand this parable, it is important to know what word Jesus has been spreading in the thirteen chapters of Matthews' Gospel preceding this reading.



In the chapters preceding the Parable of the Sower, Jesus calls on us to be merciful and pure of heart. He tells us not to be consumed by anger, not to retaliate, but to love our enemies and to pray for them. We are cautioned against trying to serve two masters. We are told that we should put our complete trust in God. We are taught to treat others as we would want to be treated. We are cautioned not to deceive ourselves into thinking we are righteous just because we pay lip service to the Word. We are exhorted to be doers, not just listeners. This is the Word. This, and more, is the seed that the sower broadcasts so lavishly and seemingly so wastefully.

I want to make a public confession to you all. In my life, right up to the present, I have failed to live up to all of these, and more. For much of my adult life I tried to serve two masters: the Army and God. The truth is that the Army got much more of my time and talent than God did. For all practical purposes, the Army was my god. Yet, I deceived myself into thinking that I was a good Christian because I went to church regularly.

Right now as I speak to you, I have anger in me and I find it almost impossible to forgive, love or pray for my enemies. I even have impure thoughts of retaliation. I think, in reality, we are all those different types of soil mentioned in the parable. On any given day, for one aspect of God's Word we might be rich soil, ready to receive it and let it take deep root. *What is the richest soil of your life? What made it so rich? Was it cultivated from birth by loving parents and teachers? Or did you become rich by learning from your own mistakes?*



Buzz Sherwood

For other aspects of God's Word, we might be rocky or weed choked soil where the Word is suffocated. Or, perhaps, our hearts are so hardened about a particular issue that the word never has a chance to even put out a root. *Is there a group or idea*

that you are closed off to or afraid of? Has personal tragedy or the uncertainty of these times shaken your faith? Is being a person of faith a source of embarrassment or something to be hidden in the secular society in which we live?

It can be liberating to come to this awareness and to know that God loves us without reservation in spite of our inability to fully live the Word. In that liberation we can celebrate those parts of us that are rich soil that bear good fruit and at the same time work at picking the stones and pulling the weeds from the remaining soil of our being so that it, too can receive the Word and bear good fruit. We are not perfect and never will be, but, by persevering on the journey and tending to the soil of our lives, we can work toward that perfection that Jesus calls us to.



Jesus ends this parable with the words he often uses at the conclusion of a lesson: *"Let anyone with ears to hear, listen."* We must hear with the head and the heart and spend time in honest reflection. Amen!

Buzz Sherwood