

The Wonderful Words of Life
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23
July 16, 2017 – Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

I have a confession to make. I fell in love when I was 36 years old. . . Oh, not with my wife, Ginny. I fell in love with Ginny when I was 20; but, at the age of 36, I fell in love with the Word of God. I had been raised in the church. There was never a time in my life when I did not attend church on a regular basis. I even attended church when I was in college; and I read my Bible, occasionally, very occasionally. Sometime in the early 1980's as attended a short-term Bible study at my home church, taught by the associate pastor. That was my introduction to what we refer to as "the historic books" of the Old Testament; and that was "nice." But then came 1989 when, through a series of events that I truly believe was led by the Holy Spirit, I found myself in a weekend class at Baldwin-Wallace College entitled "Jesus and the Gospels"; and I fell in love with the Word of God. It was that class that taught me that scripture was so much more than words on a page. It was that class that taught me that scripture was so much deeper than face value. It was in the midst of that class that I discovered that, in scripture I could find a way of life, a life filled with joy because it was a life lived in the presence, in the goodness, and in the love of Jesus Christ.

Now, don't hear that I had a less than happy life before I was 36. I have been very blessed. I've already told you that I fell in love with Ginny when I was 20. I entered into a very happy marriage when I was 23. I have the joys of music. I have a nice home. I have enjoy my work; and my activity in the church. Indeed, all my life has been good. But, at the point that I fell in love with the Word of God, life was not only good, life was complete, whole, altogether; and that's what today's parable is all about. Before I fell in love with the Word, too many of my seeds were falling on rocky ground.

Yes, I love the Word of God as presented in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The psalmist tells us that the word is "a lamp unto our feet"; and indeed the scriptures do provide a guidebook for life; but I am constantly amazed at the depth of scripture. I've stated before that I can read and meditate on a few verses of scripture that I have studied dozens of times before, and still find something new, something fresh calling out from the page, calling me to a new experience of God's amazing love. Only the Bible can do that. (So, let me take a moment for advertising here. Tuesday evenings this fall, we'll begin a new Bible Study – Twelve Weeks in the Fall on the Old Testament; and Twelve Weeks in the Spring on the New Testament. I hope you'll plan on spending Tuesday Evenings at the church to delve deeper into these wonderful words.) But now, as we consider the depth of scripture, let us take another look at the parable of the sower.

This parable can be viewed from multiple perspectives. I've spoken of how the Word has been planted in my life; and I hope, at least to some degree, the Word has been planted in your life. But let's look again from the perspective of the sower, the farmer who is sowing the seed. As Christians, all of us are called not only to let the Word of God's amazing love grow in our lives; we are called to spread that Good News to all whom we meet. We're called to be sowers of the Word, not just recipients.

I cannot help but think that this parable had a personal dimension for Jesus. Think of the challenges of his life. How many of his teachings fell on rocky, thorny, weedy ground. It was just a few chapters earlier that Jesus' hand-picked disciples lost faith during a storm at sea. We know the Pharisees continually wanted to choke out Jesus' message of love. Jesus experienced rejection by his hometown Nazarene neighbors. He was condemned by Jewish leadership and crucified by Roman authorities. Indeed Jesus knew what it was to spread seeds, to try and encourage growth on hard soil. At the point that Jesus was teaching the crowd it would have been very easy to go back to the carpenter's shop and forget about this "God thing." But Jesus never gave up. Jesus not only recited this parable, he lived it; and he calls us to likewise live it.

By virtue of our baptism, by virtue of our identity as Christians, we are called to spread the Good News of God's love by our thoughts, our words, and our actions. And it's no secret that some of that spreading, some of that sharing, some of that sowing is going to fall on rocky, arid, or weed-infested ground. Some and maybe even most of our Good News will be rejected. It will, as the saying goes, "fall on deaf ears." But, this parable, and much of the rest of Matthew's Gospel reminds us that the rejection of Jesus' message does not mean the message is wrong or the efforts are ill spent. Some of the seeds will not germinate. That's a fact in both farming and in faith.

There is another fact in farming and in faith. . . Some of the seeds just might germinate late. How often it has happened to me personally – I was certain that, hard as I might try, the message just was not getting through to someone; and then, weeks or maybe even months later, they came back to tell me that they had found meaning and faith, that they had personally experienced the grace of God. And so, we continue to sow the seeds knowing that some will die; but we also know that some will grow. Some will grow now; and maybe, just maybe, some will grow later.

And this brings me to the third point of the parable – the miraculous harvest. Friends, I'm no farmer, but I know enough to know that any seed that will yield a hundred fold harvest is truly miraculous – but so it is with the Word of God. Look at Jesus. His followers denied knowing him and ran away. His own people rejected him; and he died on a cross between two thieves with only a few loving people standing by. But today, he is worshiped by over a third of the people in the

world. Look at Paul, whipped at least five times, jailed multiple times, but Paul is responsible for spreading Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome. Look at all the saints of the church from the time of Jesus to the present – spreading seeds; many of which fell on hard soil and baked in the scorching sun; but some fell on good soil and yielded truly miraculous harvests.

Friends, that's why I do what I do. That's why the church does with it does. That's why we are here. That's why we are called to follow in the Word. This is not just a parable of encouragement. This is not just a parable to tell us to keep on doing what we do. No, ultimately this is a parable of faith. The bottom line message of this parable is: If we keep sowing we can expect the miraculous harvest. If we keep sowing we will know God's abundance. Ultimately, this is a parable that calls us to trust God. Jesus knows the hard ways of this world. He also knows the abundant ways of God.

May each of us first let the wonderful Word of God grow in us. May we then go forth to spread that Word of God's great love to others. And finally, may we have faith that, despite some failure, despite some rejection, the Word will grow to yield a heavenly abundance, greater than we can possibly imagine.

Thanks be to God for the gift of his wonderful Word.

Let us pray. . .

Lord,
Give us faith, give us courage, give us hope,
that we may spread the wonderful words of your amazing love,
that all might know the joys of life with you.
Amen

Rev. Mark L. Steiger, Pastor
North Olmsted United Methodist Church