Text: Matthew 13: 1-23

**Introduction**

Every time the parable of the sower comes up, I have to be honest, it’s a hard week for a preacher. Because really, what more are you going to say about it. Now there is a way that complaint is true almost every week. And part of the answer is simply “I love to tell the story.” But the Sower might be the one parable that still has common purchase. I could tell someone they are asking me to make bricks without straw, and I get a blank face, as Moses and the Exodus is no longer a story that all kids learn. But somehow everybody still hears “a sower went out to sow.”

**Text**

We’ve remarked in the recent past that the Gospel according to Matthew is built around five Sermons – scholars call them discourses – of Jesus. The first two were rather straightforward. The Sermon on the Mount and the Missionary Discourse when Jesus sent out the twelve apostles. Now in life there are times to be straightforward, and there are times you have to use a bit of misdirection or mystery. There are men - and women – who will say “tell it to me straight.” And some of them might even mean it. But there are also many that if you tell the story straight you will get a yawn and they will stop listening halfway through. And the end result is that they think they know what you said, but didn’t hear a thing.

And I think that might be the part of his mission that Jesus is at. The straightforward preaching has brought in all that will hear it. So Jesus changes his approach. First, “Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.” Yes, the sermon on the mount was outside, but much of the early ministry takes place in synagogues or in homes. And what takes place in the home is in some sense to family. The second half of our gospel text today establishes something of a pattern. Jesus will say one thing in parables to the crowds, and then he will give an explanation in the house. More on that shortly. The Second change that Jesus does is “he told them many things in parables.” Gone is “You have heard it said…but I tell you….” Gone is the direct address teaching. In its place are the parable…with their teasing mystery.

Now I wish that our lectionary makers didn’t cut out the verses in the middle, because I think they are important. In them the disciple’s first question to Jesus is “hey, why are you preaching in parables?” And Jesus’ answer is not what we would all desire. We’d like something roughly like what I hinted at already. “Some people need to work it out on their own, or need a puzzle.” But that is nowhere close to what he says. Jesus divides the world into two groups. The disciples who are hearing him, “to you it has been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven.” But then he tells those disciples, to the crowds, “to them it has not been given.” The purpose of the parables is both to reveal and to hide. “To the one who has, more will be given. To the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” The parables are not cute little stories for children. They are mysteries of the Kingdom for the more mature.

And so Jesus tells the parable of a sower went out to sow seed and it falls on four different types of soil. And then later with just the disciples he gives the interpretation. So the straightaway peaching – which should be easily recognizable in the world – is that when the old old story is told, not everyone receives it in the same way. There are those who are not in any way prepared to hear it – the hard ground. There are those who hear it and accept it, but when the first challenges of faith appear, quickly turn away – the rocky soil. There are those who receive it and persist in faith through some trials, but eventually the world is just too much – the thorny ground. Mark that Jesus calls these “unfruitful.” And finally there is good soil which is fruitful in a variety of yields.

So at the simple textual level, the parable is something of a repeat of the missionary discourse. But if that is all it was, why bother?

**Christology**

One of those deeper meanings that I think can be teased out of the parable is something that we might not always think appropriate. The Sower is of course Christ himself and the seed is the Word of God. And in the parable the Sower is rather nonchalant about where he sows. A careful sower, a good human farmer, wouldn’t throw seed on the sidewalk. For that matter a human farmer would pull up the weeds or know that certain land is just too rocky. But the divine sower spreads it everywhere.

From this I think we can take at least a couple of things. The first this I think we should take is that we ourselves are not competent judges of the status of the soil. The only way to judge the soil is to observe the fruitfulness. And the only path to fruitfulness is sowing seed – telling what Jesus has done for all of us. If we did not have a story like this one, I think an almost impossible temptation would be to be very careful with the seed. Afraid of wasting seed or offending the Word or some type of impurity we would build granaries but rarely sow. The lesson here I think is that risk bordering on recklessness in sharing what Christ has done is the call. Go throw seed on the sidewalk. The asphalt rose is always the most beautiful.

The second thing I think is reflective of the mystery of the incarnation itself. The sowing takes place in this world. The seed must fall to the ground and die for the plant to spring forth and yield abundantly. Jesus came into this world to give himself. And he continues to give himself in this world. Because Christ was fruitful, because Christ was faithful unto death, he was raised from the dead. Our fruitfulness is tied directly to his. He is the vine we are the branches. We are baptized into his death so that we too might rise to new life.

**Moral**

And that opens up another lesson we can take away. The point of Sowing in to reap. I want you to notice that on the hard ground the evil one – Satan – comes and snatches away the word that has been sown on the heart. The rocky ground is described as having no root in himself. It is our sinful nature that leads us away at the first good opportunity. And it is the cares of the world that can make the thorny ground unfruitful. Our three great enemies: the devil, the world and our sinful nature have different paths, but ultimately the same effect. They would all make sure that the harvest is unfruitful.

The good soil – “the one who hears the word and understands it” – bears fruit and yields. A true faith will bear fruit. Good works will naturally come from that faith. And part of that true faith is to recognize and understand what the word tells us – that we have enemies in this world. And if we are not watchful, even what we have will be taken away by them. And that is all to easy.

**Eschatological**

While that should be a solemn warning, the final thing we should take away is the promise. Some seed **does** fall on good soil. And that seed that **does** fall on good soil **will** bear fruit: one 100, one 60 and one 30.

The Word of God does not return empty. And that goes not just for good works done now, but even more on the last day. The Word of God come to earth and planted in death has risen and will yield that uncountable number of saints that John saw. The Word of God come to earth accomplishes that which was its purpose –a harvest - to save his elect.

And that is you.

You are in the house. And to you has been given the secrets of the Kingdom. To you has been given the Word and the understanding. And not Satan, nor the World, not even our sinful nature can rip you away from Christ. The seed has fallen on good soil. And you will surely yield a harvest. He who **has** ears, let him hear.