

Luke 8:5-15
The Sower

The Twentieth First Sunday
after Pentecost

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A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. {6} And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. {7} And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. {8} And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. {9} And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? {10} And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. {11} Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. {12} Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. {13} They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. {14} And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. {15} But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen. Today is the Twenty First Sunday after Pentecost¹, and it is also the day that we remember the Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. This council established permanently what the church had always known concerning the holy icons.

Today, we read the parable of the Sower, which is a very familiar parable, known even to people that are not Christians. So many of these parables are really part and parcel of our culture. People even use biblical terminology and don't even know that they are using it.

How do these parables affect us? There is an inner meaning and an outer meaning to these parables. Why did our Lord speak in parables? He certainly said quite a few of them, didn't He? Why did he say things with a hidden meaning? The Fathers explain to us that when you look into something deeply and carefully, when it takes effort to look into it, then you develop more of an understanding. If something is handed to you and there is no effort involved in learning it, then you develop very little understanding.

We can see this principle even in secular life. Look at how young people can barely even read and write now, because of this television age that we are in. Information is given to them so freely it takes very little effort to find it out.

Also the parables are given because God does not those who are not worthy to be told things that they will be judged for. A man must do some investigation if he is to learn the deep meaning of these things, and God will judge us for what we know. God will also judge us for what we don't know, if we CHOOSE to not know things. God will judge us the same if we know something and don't do it or we choose to be ignorant in the ways of piety. If we are willfully ignorant, and this occurs whenever we do not try to

seek out the knowledge of God's commandments and exercise them in our life, God will then judge us in the Judgment, even if we try to say we do not know something.

What is the inner and outer meaning of this parable? There is a lot of explanation given for this parable, even in the very text of scripture itself. It is very rare in scripture where our Lord actually explains the deeper meaning of some dark saying of His. The Apostles came to Him, and they must have also come to Him many other times, and they said, we don't understand this at all. He explained this to them, because it's meaning is so important.

"A sower went out to sow his seed". Who is the sower? None other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Be careful when you read scripture -- every word has meaning. The Sower went OUT to sow his seed". He did not go "out" from the farmhouse and start to work -- this "going out" is the incarnation of the Son of God. The seed is the word of God, those words that He spoke.

As he sowed, some seed fell by various places, the wayside, the rock, among the thorns and on good ground. It "fell". It was not thrown. It fell everywhere equally, and these places, are the souls of men. The preexisting one, Jesus Christ, thought it not robbery to be equal to us, and became a man. And He sowed his teaching to the entire universe, equally and freely to all men. It is available to everyone.

There are four kinds of men described in this parable, and, three of those kinds perished. Three out of the four kinds of men will perish. The majority will perish. This is true in our age, and has been true in every age. The majority of people will not inherit the Kingdom of God, because they are not the good ground. And yet our Lord and Savior still sows His seed, and still gives the

opportunity to a man to accept Him and to follow His commandments.

Remember the story of the talents? The man with the one talent -- our Lord knew that He was not going to use this talent. Remember what a talent is? It is the grace of God, which enables us to do good works, to do His commandments, and to learn more of Him. The man with the one talent is like the ground by the wayside. The fowls of the air immediately snatch away the word from his heart, and he never really believes at all. I am sure we have known people like that, who really have no belief whatsoever. The wayside is hard, and packed down. No seed can penetrate into it, and it is washed away, or it sits there, prey for the birds of the air. The birds are the demons, which snatch away the word from a man's heart, but only because a man leaves it out there, unprotected, and does not cherish it. The demons cannot take away the word from your heart if you hold it close to yourself, only if you care nothing for it.

So these men by the wayside, they have no part in salvation whatsoever, they never even bothered to believe. Some of the seed fell upon the rock, and when it was spring up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. Have you every been to a glade? This is an area where there is a thin layer of soil over limestone bluffs, and only certain kinds of plants can grow. When there is a drought, everything dies, except for a few very hardy trees. There is a little bit of soil, a very small amount, but there is not enough soil to retain any moisture, which is the essence of Christ. There is just a small amount of knowledge, and not much struggle or desire, and at the merest, smallest trial, such a person falls away, and he perishes.

Some people are thorny ground. The thorns spring up with the good wheat, the word of God. These thorns choke out the

following of the commandments. They choke out the knowledge of God, because we turn away from God, to our thorns, whatever they are, whether they be riches, cares of this world, sensual pleasures, our pride, our fear, ambition. There are hundreds of ways that a man can turn away from Christ, even though he appears to be a Christian.

Remember the parable about the wheat and the tares? These tares are the same as thorns. The tares are growing up right by the wheat, and except to a man who has extreme discretion and knowledge, and of course, the God-man, Jesus Christ, such people are sometimes indistinguishable to true Christians. They go to church, they have families, they may give alms, and they do everything externally just like everybody else, except they don't have any life within them. Where their treasure is, so their heart is, and their treasure is not Christ, so Christ is not with them. Those people who are amidst the thorns have not Christ, even though they would call themselves Christians.

Some of the seed, a small amount of the seed, by the way, fell on good ground. And it sprang up and bear fruit. St. Luke says a hundred fold, and St. Matthew also recounts this story and shows that the Lord gave other information. Some sprang up thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred fold, because not all the Saints are the same. Not everyone follows the word of God to the same degree, or the same amount. I guess that is good news to me, because I don't at this moment think that I can become like the Saints. I shouldn't think this way, because God can change a man, if he only gives himself to Him. However, if none of us lives with the LOFTY righteousness of the Saints, God has a place for us in His mansion, since there are many rooms, if we make an effort to live according to His commandments.

I have said this many times before; success is not as important as your effort. If you make an effort, then in the end, paradoxically, you will be successful, because God will receive your repentance, and reward you, for some thirty, some sixty, some one hundred. May it be that we all receive a hundred fold. May we all be like the man who had five talents, and labored and increased it to ten, and then our Lord gave him an infinite amount of grace.

Now, how is it that we can be good ground? Isn't that really what we should try to learn from this parable? What is good ground? Good ground has been tilled carefully, and dug, and the clods of dirt have been broken up, and it has been finely sifted, and fertilizer has been added to it, and it has been watered, and hedged round about so that animals can not get in. It has been guarded, so not one can steal the fruits it will produce. There is effort involved in having good ground. It does not just "happen".

Last year, I tilled a part of my property in order to plant. I did not take care of it this year, and did not plant, and you can not even TELL that it was good ground, and it was VERY good ground after I had finished with it, but I didn't take care of it, and so, it reverted back. The same thing will happen to us. If we do not take care of the seed that is planted within us, we will revert back to the type of man we previously were, and we will allow the tares to grow in us. They will choke us out. Even if there are not tares to begin with – the seeds of tares fly through the air, don't they? So do the demons. The tares can come into good ground at any time, and they constantly must be plucked out and uprooted with great care. It is very painful to tear out many tares by the way, especially thorns and thistles, because they are sharp and they cut, and make us bleed. Regardless, we must do this work, and tear out these thorns and thistles if we are to be good ground, if indeed, we have EVEN begun to be good ground!

Our Savior says about those on the good ground, “But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” There are those words, that we have trouble with (I have trouble with them sometimes); “Having heard the word, KEEP it and bring forth fruit with PATIENCE.” Patience is the most difficult word in our language. the Christian life is patience, endurance. He who endures to the end will be saved. We are just beginning you know. And if indeed there is some part of our soul that is good ground, let us make the rest of it good ground, by careful labor, by backbreaking labor. And, while we are cleaning out those parts of our souls, let us at the same time pay attention to the places we have cleared, so the tares do not come in, and choke us.

How are we to do this? This is a task beyond our abilities! The Apostle tells us, in a marvelous way. He says, “For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”² Marvelous, magnificent words! May they be true in our lives. May we say that we no longer live, but Christ lives in us. May we live by faith, since this is the only way to accomplish our task. And what is our task? It is to know Christ isn’t it? Isn’t that what it said in the other gospel today?³ Our Savior was praying to His Heavenly father, shortly before He was going to go to His great passion for our salvation, and He said, “And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”⁴

What is knowledge? Knowledge is intimacy. Knowledge is ... love. To know God is to love Him, and give everything to Him. We see evidence of this kind of love even in our own relationships. The love of a husband for a wife, or a child for his mother or

father, and especially the love of an infant, such perfect love. But just like a child who is not so intimate with his parents after he has done something wrong – he doesn't show up in the same room for a while, he doesn't want to talk to them, he hangs his head, he has broken communion with them because of guilt --- so it is with us, if we do not follow the Lord's commandments. Then, we will not be able to cry "Abba, Father", because we will be hanging our head in shame. Or worse, I say most people don't do that, because they cannot bear that kind of shame. Instead, they just leave God. They become choked with cares, or lusts or passions, with misplaced priorities, or they become even worse than that, and they wither away, and have no faith whatsoever. That's what happens to most people.

I hope that in our church, if you forgive the expression, we beat the "odds". I hope that all of us will be good ground, but I know that the only way that this can be possibly true is if we struggle -- apart and together. We must pray for one-another, help one-another, and then, in our corner, in our closet, cry out to God each day, asking Him to help us with whatever passions we have, with whatever sins we commit. Even if we have poor attitudes, and we desire to change our attitudes.

Do you know that all sin, and even all action proceeds from thought? Everything we do proceeds from thought. We decide to do something, and then we do it, whether it is good or bad. So we must amend our thoughts. That is why the Apostle Paul says, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."⁵ Train yourself! So now, if you want to be good ground, you must not add any trash to this ground. You must not add such things as impure thoughts, gossip, judging others. You can surely

think of many other things that are within your heart that you do and that are affecting your ground. And if ground is left alone, and just walked over, and not cared for, it becomes the wayside. It becomes hard and the seed can no longer penetrate, and that which is in it dies, or never germinates. So we have a great labor to do, my brothers and sisters. We must continue to care for our ground carefully. And we must have patience.

There are two sides to patience. One is that we must be patient with our position in life, with our status, with the amount of money we make, with the difficulties we are encountering. We must not curse God or say that we should have this or we should have that. This is one kind of patience.

There is another kind – a very important kind of patience. Allow God to work! It takes time for Him to work. We do not know how much time we have, but the time we have is what God has allotted to us. He is going to use every moment of that time to perfect us. So, if we have trouble with our sins, if there is something that we fall into every day, then EVERY day repent of it, and be patient! Be manly in spirit, and do not be like a child and run away from that sin, or rather, run away from the knowledge of that sin, since it will always be with you until you conquer it. Confront it! Confront it with sword and with shield, and with buckler, and with faith.⁶ Eventually, God will deliver you. It will happen. It is guaranteed. If a man struggles to know to know God's commandments, He will reveal them. This is absolutely certain, because in your struggling, you will be doing His commandments.

So, be patient, and cultivate your ground every day, every moment. However, be careful not to judge yourself. This is a hard lesson, that takes us a long time to learn – to not judge ourselves, and look at the sins we are doing and to say we can never do better. Well, in some things we do better, and in some things, God help us and

forgive us, we have done worse, but the demons cannot take away from us that we are children of the Most High. We are able to cry “Abba Father”, only if we are struggling to live in Christ. God lives within us. He enlightens us, He helps us, even though we are sinners. So, if He has come to us and has offered us FREELY His grace and mercy, who are we, in our pride and arrogance to say “that is not enough mercy or enough grace. I can’t change”? Every man can change. Everyone can change magnificently if he only allows God to change him, but this takes time, a lot of time. I am sure, you are like me, and are very tired of your sins. They weigh us down, they are like an anchor, and they cut and they hurt. And yet, in some weird and perverted way, they are dear to us. They must be dear to us in some way, but God understands, and will help us if we make an effort, and if we are patient.

None of us right now are the wayside because we are at least trying to be Christians. Some of us may be the rock, some may be thorns. God knows, and this will be all revealed in the end. Even if you have very little soil right now, and even if you are choked with thorns and cares, God will help you to become good soil. He will help any man to become good soil. He is no respecter of persons. Any man that desires will be given, freely, God’s mercy. So take God’s mercy and clasp it to your hearts. Hold in to it and cultivate it, and be good soil, and God will save you.

Amen.

Luke 8:5-15 - The Parable of the Sower

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¹ This homily was transcribed from one given On Oct 14, 1996 according to the church calendar, being the Twenty First Sunday after Pentecost, and the day appointed for the commemoration of the Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. There are some stylistic changes and minor corrections made and several footnotes have been added, but otherwise, it is essentially in a colloquial, “spoken” style. It is hoped that something in these words will help and edify the reader, but a sermon read from a page cannot enlighten a soul as much as attendance and reverent worship at the Vigil service, which prepares the soul for the Holy Liturgy, and the hearing of the scriptures and the preaching of them in the context of the Holy Divine Liturgy. In such circumstances the soul is enlightened much more than when words are read on a page.

² Galations 2:19-20

³ John 17:1-13, read for the Sunday of the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, and other times during the year

⁴ John 17:3

⁵ Philippians 4:8

⁶ Cf. Ephesians 6:13-17