

The Parable

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, July 16, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Our Lord tells His first parable and then our Lord decodes it.

Some of us have said that our Lord interprets His parable, but since all language requires interpretation, it makes a parable special when the Lord takes the time to explain why He told the story that He told.

Interpreting the parable is easy. We all understand seeds, and roads, and birds, and eating. We can at least understand if not have personal experience with rocky ground and plants that spring up, and plants that wither. We understand about weeds and can therefore understand what our Lord says about thorn plants. And we understand yields.

What is unclear until our Lord explains it is why He told the story at all. Why instruct the crowds by talking about basic agriculture? What does this have to do with the other things that our Lord says?

When our Lord does explain the parable He does it in a way so that we understand that one thing is standing in for another. That is what codes do. In a code one thing is standing in for another. One must have the key to the code in order to know what stands in for what so that a message can be decoded. Our Lord decodes this, the first of His parables.

He says that the seed that fell along the path are people who hear the message of the kingdom, but do not understand it and the evil one comes and takes away what was sown. He says that the seeds that fall on rocky ground are people who hear the word of God and receive it with joy immediately, but since they have not root in themselves as soon as persecution comes, they quickly fall away. The seed that falls among the thorns are people who hear the word of God but the anxieties of life and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and it proves unfruitful. The seeds that fall on good soil are people. They are people who hear the word of God and understand and bear fruit.

Thus parables are stories where one thing stands in for another. One must know the code in order to decode them. In this the first of His parables the Lord provides the key. He decodes it so that you know that His parables should be decoded and gives you a guide as to how they should be decoded. He also decodes the parable of the weeds and the wheat in order to provide you with more guidance.

Thus far parables.

Now for the people in this parable.

There are people who hear the message of the kingdom and do not understand it.

Now let us be clear these are people who do not understand the basics or do not understand most of it. The Lord is not talking about you when you read a passage of the Bible and do not understand it. The Lord is not talking about you when you do not understand some mystery of the faith.

The Lord rather is talking about those who people who when they hear of the resurrection of Jesus, do not understand it. For whatever reason they do not understand and cannot accept the fact that someone rose from the dead. That is what the Lord is talking about.

He is talking about people who do not understand that all people are sinners before God. Why they do not understand this may be varied. They may not know about sin. They may not acknowledge sin. They may not understand that all are sinners in the eyes of God. They may want to justify themselves in the eyes of God and therefore cannot understand why everyone would be a sinner in the eyes of God.

He is talking about those people who have listened to religious programming on the radio or the TV set or read things on the internet for so long, that by the time they read or hear something that is the truth of the message of the kingdom, they are so lost and confused that they do not understand it.

Even though the very word of the kingdom has come to these people it does not stay with them. They do not understand it and so the evil one comes and takes away the message that they have so that they will not believe and be saved.

There are people like this.

There are also people who hear the message of the kingdom and at once receive it with joy.

There are people who hear about Jesus and His death and resurrection for forgiveness and salvation and immediately are impressed. They rejoice in the forgiveness of their sins. They immediately enroll in adult catechesis. They join the congregation. They are eager to volunteer for all kinds of things. They are eager to have their catechesis done and join the church. If they have not been baptized, they have themselves baptized.

Then something happens and it happens because of the message of the kingdom. Someone makes fun of them for their faith in Jesus. Someone points out how ignorant and unintellectual it is to believe in Jesus. Someone points out how evil people in Jesus have behaved and they fear that the person pointing it out to them will put them in the same category too.

And because of the persecution, they quit the Divine Service. They quit reading their Bible at home. They quit having anything to do with the things that Jesus instituted to give people faith.

Now I must say that such people are quite rare in our country. We do not face the terrible persecutions that people who believe in Jesus face in the Middle East or Africa. No one is beheaded in the United States for being a Christian. Yes, there are some people who lose their businesses for being a Christian, but that is not the same as being beheaded. Our Bibles and our worship is legal unlike in Saudi Arabia where it is illegal. No one is targeting us for violence as is happening in some African countries.

Those are the people who receive the message with joy and then when they are threatened with persecution, they quickly fall away.

Our problem in the United States is the seed among the thorns.

These are people who receive the message of the kingdom, but then such people go out and face the anxiety of life and it gets to them. They face the break-up of their marriage and even though they had just started going to church, they quit now. They face cancer or some other disaster and the things of faith simply are not that important anymore and they abandon Jesus in favor of solutions that are more obvious to their reason and more immediate to their senses.

These are just examples. It can be anything. Some anxiety in their life is more important to them than their faith in Jesus. They leave Jesus in the face of such thorns.

Other thorns that choke people's faith is the deceitfulness of wealth. Either the possession of great wealth or the desire for great wealth distracts some who believe in Jesus from Jesus. Some people who are wealthy believe that God has blessed them because they are deserving. Such people do not believe that they need a Savior to forgive them of anything. Such people pursue wealth such that it is a god to them and if wealth is their god then they abandon the God of the kingdom. Such people who have done this may even attend to the Divine Service, but they are there and contribute to the congregation's efforts not for the sake of the Gospel, but so that their wealth may be known to others or in order to use the congregation as a means of building a monument to their efforts or their family. Such people go to Divine Service every Sunday, but do not believe in Jesus. The deceitfulness of wealth has choked them.

And then there is the seed that fell on good soil.

It produces fruit. Our Lord does not say what kind of yield. He does not seem interested in that. All He mentions are the amounts of the yield. And when He decodes the parable, He mentions the amounts again. One thing that is clear. It does not matter to the Lord how much fruit you yield for Him. Some of you are going to yield thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred. It does not matter to Him how much yield you make. The point is that the message of the kingdom will produce a yield in you. That is what the message does. It does not matter what the yield is. The message of the kingdom will produce a yield. You will wind up doing something for God. Some of you will do big things for God. Some of you will do small things for God. Such assessments are in the eyes of the world. God receives them all, thirty, sixty, or a hundred.

And one last thing.

You cannot be in more than one category at a time.

If you are a person who hears the words of the kingdom and does not understand them, then you will never be someone who receives them with joy or that gets choked. You will certainly not be a person who yields.

If you are a person who falls away because of persecution, you are not going to be a person who gets choked. And if you are a person who gets choked, you are not going to be a person who falls away because of persecution. And neither of these people is going to be someone who yields for God. And the people who produce a yield for God are not going to be the ones who fail to understand the message of the kingdom, nor do they fall away, nor are they choked. They produce a yield.

This means that any one person including any of us here can only fall into one of these categories at a time. We cannot be both one who yields well and is choked or falls away or who fails to understand. We cannot be both one who is choked, or falls away and fails to understand and at the same time one who produces a yield no matter how big or how small.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen