# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“The Sower and the Seed”**

**Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

 **October 2, 2022**

We continue our study of Jesus’ parables this morning with the parable of the sower and the seed. I invite you to turn with me to Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Later that same day Jesus left the house and sat beside the lake. A large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat there and taught as the people stood on the shore. He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: “Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn’t have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand. Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don’t understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God’s word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”

Imagine two men, both of whom had been on the shore when Jesus told his parable, later running into each other in the marketplace. One of them says to the other: “What did you think of Jesus and his story? I went thinking that he was going to tell us about the kingdom of heaven, but all I heard was a story about a farmer.” The other man responds: “I also went thinking he was going to tell us about the kingdom of heaven, and I have come to believe that he is the One sent from God to begin that kingdom here on earth.” Two men, hearing the same story, meeting the same Jesus, having the same hopes for God’s rule here on earth, and one of them gets it while the other doesn’t. What’s the difference between the two? Faith! Faith is the difference. One lacks it, and as a result he is unable to hear with ears of faith and understand. The other has faith, a faith given to him by God, and consequently he hears and understands.

When later in Matthew chapter 16 Jesus asks Peter, “Who do you say that I am,” Peter responds: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replies, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.” Faith is a gift from God, and those who have been given this gift see Jesus and know that he is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. The purpose of Jesus’ parable is to reveal this truth.

Some see Jesus - they hear his words, they observe his actions – and it has absolutely no effect on them. They hear the message of the kingdom of heaven that Jesus spread while here on earth, and they couldn’t care less. A second kind of response are those who see Jesus and it has an initially positive effect. They like some of his teaching, the way he cares for others, the idea of a heavenly Father who loves them, and they are happy to believe these things. But, then something goes wrong in their life or they are given a hard time for hanging out with the Jesus crowd, and they decide Jesus really isn’t for them. Similar to the second group, a third type of respondent initially raises their hand or comes forward at the altar call to accept Jesus, but the worries of this life and the attraction of worldly pleasures cause them to have a divided loyalty – some for Jesus, but more for what they want, when and how they want it. Eventually, Jesus will no longer be in the picture.

To see Jesus and know that he is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, is to see Jesus with eyes of faith. To hear what Jesus commands and have both the desire and the will to do what he asks is to hear with the ears of faith. These are the people, Jesus declares, who will bear fruit in the kingdom of heaven. The fruit of salvation is theirs. The fruit of growing stronger in faithful obedience is theirs. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is increasing, such as love, joy, peace and patience. The fruit of wanting to share Jesus with others so they also may see and hear is emerging. Each person’s fruit is individual according to the gifts of God and the guidance of the Spirit – some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred – but all are fruit of the kingdom of heaven in those who live by faith.

If this were the only teaching of Jesus that we possessed, we might be tempted to believe that a person’s lack of faith is unchangeable, that it is forever as Jesus describes it here: hard, shallow, or crowded out. But, if that were the case, if hearts couldn’t change, there would be no one who could be characterized as being good soil. For all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All of us began life with a heart devoid of faith, with eyes and ears turned inward and not towards God. But hearts can and do change. Hearts have the capacity, through the gift of faith and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, to become fruitful. Indeed, it is quite possible that a single individual can experience all four of these conditions in the course of their life. Those of us who have friends and loved ones whose hearts are not fruitful for God should never give up praying for them, for God is able to soften the hard heart, to deepen the shallow heart, and to make himself known to the heart crowded with the cares of this world.

Where is your heart, where is my heart, today? How does it respond when it hears the words of Jesus? Do we believe that God can change the human heart, making it ever new? Will we ask God, as did King David, to “Create in me a clean heart, O God?” Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.