



**Northeastern
Ohio Synod**

God's work. Our hands.

NEOS Summer Sabbath Sermon Series

July 16, 2023

Lectionary 15, Year A

Pastor Mitch Phillips

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

In Matthew's gospel, both Jesus and his disciples "sow the seed" of God's word by proclaiming the good news that "the kingdom of heaven is near." Now, in a memorable parable, Jesus explains why this good news produces different results in those who hear.

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!"

¹⁸"Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Sermon Text

Let's talk about the "Good Ole Days" - whenever they were
remember schools in the good ole days?

Educational development was all about the 3 R's:

- reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic

obviously spelling was NOT a strong suit

Well, I have some R's for today - 4 of them - about faith development

- these describe living as the children of God - with some help from the parable of the sower

the 4 R's: Roots - Ritual - Relationships - Response

We start with Roots

have to be connected to something to sustain growth

- that was problem with the seed on rocky ground

- no depth of root
in the church, our rootedness is in the Gospel

Gospel: the Good News of a loving and gracious God who sent Jesus to live among us -
to put a face on God's love - and then through the cross deliver us from bondage to sin
and death

Gospel: the Good News of a loving and gracious God who has done this for us -
who has created a relationship with us - simply because God loves us. We do not
deserve this - we cannot earn this - it is a gift.

And all that God asks is that we live in response - but that's the fourth R - which we'll get
to in a moment

we encounter this Gospel - this Good News - through the Word of God: life of Jesus (the
Word enfleshed), scripture (written Word), proclamation (spoken Word), through other
people (lived Word)

need to study, learn, immerse ourselves in the Word
private study, small groups, Bible study classes

Next R: Ritual

this is what helps us get connected to our roots & God
that was the problem for the seed on path
- did not get connected

lots of rituals in life
- some repeated so absent-mindedly they are like our habits:
- morning or evening routines, how we say hello or goodbye

in church, also an abundance of ritual
- cause of lots of arguments
different rituals have meaning for different people
Worship: somber/quiet - celebration/raucous
Pray: kneel, sit, stand
Baptism: sprinkle, pour, immerse
Communion: come to rail - stand or kneel, continuous
Can't say any of these options are really right or wrong

sometimes ritual can cease to have meaning or purpose - then need to find new
rituals that do
like the newlyweds - wife baking ham cuts off end
- there are things we do that we no longer have any clue why they
are done that way

our core rituals in the church are called sacraments
- as mentioned before - lots of variety in practice
- the **how** is not the most important

- What is most important that we *do* - that we do engage in the ritual and therefore maintain our connectedness with God & God's word
these sacraments are Baptism & Holy Communion

- all about connection - getting and staying connected to God and the family of God

The third R: Relationships

these can help nurture us - or tear us down

that's what happened to the seed among thorns

- got into some bad relationships with weeds: choked out

we as Christians can also be choked out - we need to cultivate good, strong relationships with the right people

I really don't need to give examples of how the people we hang out with begin to rub off on us - we pick up their mannerisms, phrases, attitudes, and actions

This is why participating in worship together is so important

- and fellowship

- and study groups or small groups or ministry teams

The final R: Response

(remember I said earlier that this is what God asks of us?)

this is what happens when everything else comes together

- this is the seed on the good soil - it RESPONDED

this seed had depth of soil for roots, got connected to what was necessary (ritual), found itself in good relationships, and it responded - in a big way

for a farmer in Jesus' day - good yield was tenfold

Here it was 30, 60, even 100-fold

My siblings in Christ, a response is expected of us as well

when we are rooted in the Gospel - in the Word

when we engage in the rituals that keep us connected

when we cultivate good relationships

then we too will respond, in great ways

What kind of response?

Loving and serving God and neighbor

Making God the center of our lives and helping others to catch a glimpse of the love and grace of God as we seek to address the hurts and hopes in their lives

The abundant yield will then be:

- more people getting rooted in the Gospel,

- and experiencing the ritual that gets us connected,

- and enjoying the relationships that help one along through life
which will then lead to still more response

4 R's - Roots, Ritual, Relationships, Response - are what lead to the good days in our individual faith journey - and in the lives of our congregations

I invite you to consider the quality of each of these in your life