

# THE SERMON SUPPLY



A Resource from  
Region 6



## Lectionary 15, Year A

*Bishop Timothy Graham, Indiana-Kentucky Synod*  
Gospel Text - Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

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

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

<sup>18</sup> "Hear, then, the parable of the sower. <sup>19</sup> When 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. <sup>20</sup> As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, <sup>21</sup> yet 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. <sup>22</sup> As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of this age and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. <sup>23</sup> But 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:**

Dear ones, I am Bishop Timothy Graham, called to serve the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. I bring greetings from 165 congregations, eight campus ministries, and an amazing and grateful staff. I am delighted to bring you the Gospel sermon for the seventh Sunday after Pentecost.

Let us pray:

### **"Word Of God Speak"**

I'm finding myself at a loss for words  
And the funny thing is it's okay  
The last thing I need is to be heard  
But to hear what You would say  
    Word of God speak  
    Would You pour down like rain  
    Washing my eyes to see, Your majesty  
    To be still and know  
    That You're in this place  
    Please let me stay and rest  
    In Your holiness  
    Word of God speak  
I'm finding myself at a loss for words  
And the funny thing is it's okay

Gracious and Loving Creator, let that be our prayer: Word of God speak. Give us ears to hear. Amen.

**Grace and peace to you, from God our Creator and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

A friend of mine once told me that gardening is basically faith with dirt under your fingernails. I think that's right. Because every gardener I know is living by hope, denial, and a weather app that they check like it's the book of Revelation.

You plant something tiny. You stare at the ground like it owes you money. You water it. You talk to it. You Google, *"Is this normal?"* And then one day, somehow, there is life.

Jesus knew that the kingdom of God is like that.

In the Gospel, Jesus talks about seed and soil, hearing and understanding, bearing fruit and yielding thirty, sixty, a hundredfold. It sounds simple enough— until you remember that most of us know what it feels like not to be good soil.

Most of us know distraction and exhaustion. Most of us know what it is to hear God's word on Sunday and then have it snatched away by Monday morning emails, family stress, breaking news alerts, and the thousand tiny anxieties that live rent-free in our minds.

And if we're honest, sometimes we hear this parable and immediately turn it into a performance review, of ourselves or even worse, of others.

- “What kind of soil am I?”
- “Am I doing enough?”
- “Why am I not bearing more fruit?”

And just like that, the good news starts sounding like an evaluation from Jesus.

But that is not how the gospel works, and it is not how Lutherans hear this text.

Because we know something essential: the center of the story is not us, not our spiritual performance, not the quality of the soil. The center of the story is the extravagance of the Sower.

Jesus is the sower, flinging seed everywhere. Recklessly. Generously. Without holding back. Onto the path, onto rocky ground, into weeds, onto good soil. In other words: onto every kind of life. Onto messy lives. Distracted lives. Addicted lives. grieving lives. cynical lives. tired church lives. Small-congregation lives. Rural lives. city lives. Lives that look fruitful and lives that look like they are barely hanging on by a thread.

Jesus does not wait for perfect conditions before giving grace.

Thanks be to God, because if grace only came to people who had their act together, most of us would be in serious trouble.

Actually, all of us would.

That is one of the deep truths of this text: God’s Word does what God sends it to do. As Isaiah says, it does not return empty. The

power is in the seed, not in our self-improvement project. The power is in Christ crucified and risen, whose Word raises the dead and calls something out of nothing.

This is grace alone. This is Christ alone. The promise is in Christ, not in our spiritual landscaping.

This isn't to say the soil doesn't matter. It does. But Jesus reveals what chokes life: trouble, persecution, shallow roots, cares of the world, and the lure of wealth. Today, we face modern weeds like feeding on constant controversy and outrage, the cult of busyness, the polished public selves we manage online, and that little voice saying, "You are what you produce."

But Jesus names these things not to shame us, but rather, to free us. To help us see what crowds out life, wholeness, and abundant life. This is the law doing its work, telling the truth about us, so that the gospel can do its work, telling the truth about God. So that the truth can set us free.

And here is where the gospel gets personal.

Anyone who has known recovery knows that healing begins with honesty. New life begins when we stop pretending. Grace gets in when denial stops running the meeting.

In my own story of AA recovery, I learned that step one is not, "Try harder," but "We admitted we were powerless..." That is not about giving up; that is about telling the truth. For those of us who know the twelve-step wisdom that we are not God—and this comes as shocking news to some of us—there is deep resonance

here. We are not the savior. We are not the source of life. We cannot manufacture resurrection by trying harder.

But we can be brought low enough, honest enough, open enough, that God's mercy can take root in us. That's what faith looks like: empty hands, open soil, simply receiving what Christ gives. We are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, apart from our works.

That is not just true in recovery rooms. It is true in the church.

Congregations can get stuck in denial too. We can spend a lot of energy trying to look alive instead of receiving the life Christ gives. We can confuse activity with fruitfulness. We can assume that big numbers equal blessing and small numbers equal failure.

But Jesus never said the church's job was to be impressive.

Jesus said the Word would bear fruit.

And fruit, by the way, is not the same thing as flash.

Fruit is a congregation unwavering in support amid chaos, casseroles in fellowship halls, prayers in hospital rooms. It's a child learning Jesus loves them before even saying "Pentecost," forgiveness in families weighted with resentment, a recovering person surviving by God's grace. Fruit is shared bread, carried burdens, forgiven sins, welcomed strangers, and hope proclaimed in a world of despair.

At the font and at the table, Christ keeps planting his promise in us, feeding us with his own body and blood, so that the fruit we bear is his work, not our achievement.

That is real fruit. And Christ is still growing it.

And notice this: the good soil is not praised for being glamorous. It is simply described as hearing the word and understanding it. In biblical language, understanding is not just intellectual. It is lived trust. It is a heart made open by grace.

So maybe the question is not, "How do I become amazing soil by next Tuesday?"

Maybe the question is, "Where is Christ already at work in this messy field of my life?"

- Where has the Word already cracked something open?
- Where has mercy already begun to grow?
- Where has God kept showing up, even when you were sure nothing was happening?

Because that is another thing gardeners know: growth is often hidden before it is visible.

The kingdom of God does not usually arrive with fireworks and a soundtrack. Often it comes quietly, like a seed splitting underground. Like a heart softening. Like a person choosing not to give up. Like a congregation deciding that even in hard times, they will keep preaching Christ, keep singing, keep serving, keep trusting that God is not done.

Beloved, the church does not live by its own brilliance. The church lives by promise.

We live by the wild promise that Christ is sowing the Word, that forgiveness is real, that small things are meaningful, and that even now, God is bearing fruit among us.

If you feel more like rocky ground than fertile soil today, take heart—whether it's your faith, your congregation, or your life with weeds (welcome to the club).

Because the good news is this: the law can tell us what kind of soil we are, but the gospel tells us who the Sower is and what he has already done for us in his death and resurrection. Jesus Christ is still the Sower. Christ is still generous. Christ is still pouring out grace with holy abandon. Christ is still bringing life where we only see dirt.

And that means your story is not over. Your congregation is not over. The gospel is not finished. The seed is still in the air. The Word is still being spoken over you:

“You are mine. You are forgiven. You are loved.”

So hear the Word. Trust the promise. Receive the grace. And do not despise the small, hidden, ordinary places where God is at work.

For in Christ, even the smallest seed can become a harvest. And by the mercy of God, it will.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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