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Mark 4:1-23

Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 3 "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." 9 And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

10 When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. 11 And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret[a] of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; 12 in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.'"

13 And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. 16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. 17 But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. 18 And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. 20 And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

21 He said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? 22 For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. 23 Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

The Optimistic Sower

Countless times we've heard this text preached. Typically with the suggested reflection of what kind of soil are you? How can you get rid of the birds, thorns and rocks in your life so you can become the good soil that yields crops? But honestly that never is my first

thought when reading this text. While this text is one of Pastor Travis' favorites, it always drives me crazy. I have to remember to read it several times before I can get past its face value and begin to appreciate it.

At face value it seems as if only 1/4th of people are ever good enough. At face value it seems as if Jesus is criticizing those who have given their lives over to him. At face value it isn't something I want to read, much less something I want to support. But that's when I have to remind myself what was going on.

Remember news of Jesus' healings and teachings were spreading through the towns and countrysides. So much so that he wasn't welcome in most towns. Instead, he had to stay outside of the town gates. But even with the added distance separating people from Jesus, people still gathered in large crowds from far and near.

In fact, in some places the crowds were so large and the people were so determined to find Jesus, to hear him, to touch him, that he had to teach from boats along the shoreline. Otherwise crowds would cover him so nobody could see or hear him. And with crowds of this size, do you think the government was ok with all the power he was generating? No, no, no, no, no.

Government officials were present at many of these teachings to make sure nobody was speaking against the government officials. Because of the government officials presence Jesus had to teach so 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; Jesus had to teach in parables so he wouldn't be arrested. If he was found teaching about serving God, he would be arrested. But if he never says to serve God, instead he talks of everyday things, like sowers and different kinds of soils, well, nobody can arrest him. So when he's speaking here, in this first parable of Mark, the first parable ever presumed to be written, he's speaking secretly. And the people know it. Jesus' real-time live audience gets it. They get that he can't say anything against the government. They understand. They see the officials there and know that if they're fearful of losing their power they'll take Jesus away and they don't want that. They want Jesus. They aren't going to do anything to jeopardize that. But ironically, the disciples don't get it. They don't understand what Jesus is talking about.

You know when you're explaining something to someone and you can tell when they aren't getting it? That's what's happening here. Jesus knows the disciples aren't getting it. So he explains it to them. The seed is the word. The word that's written as well as this word that is with you today. The word that is goodness and kindness and gentleness. This word both made flesh and this word that is love. And this word is scattered out, given out to all. It doesn't matter what country the person is from. It doesn't matter what occupation the person has. It doesn't matter what baggage or history they are carrying along with them. The ground, their foundation, it doesn't matter. The seed, the word, the love is scattered and given to all, it falls on all. For the kingdom of God was made for everyone. The love of God, this word made flesh, is for all. Regardless of the soil, this sower, The Sower, is very optimistic. God knows that love is never rejected.

True love, pure, genuine love, is always appreciated and welcome. It takes root. Love changes things, it shakes the world up and is so contagious it sets the world ablaze. It grows well passed thirty, sixty, or a hundred-fold. All those ready to receive love, are loved.