**Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (Parable of the Sower) July 12, 2020**

 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

 Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of Matthew the 13th chapter here re-reading these words. “And he told them many things in parables saying: ‘A sower went out to sow.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

 Seeds and sowing, that’s what Jesus is speaking about in a parable to the massive crowd that came to see Him. So many people had come to hear Jesus that He reclines in a boat and they all stand and listen. Matthew writes that Jesus told them *many* things in parables meaning that each parable doesn’t only have one particular meaning. But here he records the parable of the sower. Now as I spoke about in the weekly e-mail this past week I was blessed to live for about 6 years in the state of Kansas which is very big on agriculture. Being educated about seeds and soil was something you were almost born with in that particular area because just about everyone was doing some sort of farming or growing, even if they had other occupations. A fun fact about agriculture areas that I didn’t know growing up, and certainly didn’t know about when I got there, was that there isn’t just one company that you go to for seeds. Just like there are multiple companies for farm equipment, there are different seed companies. And seed, just like anything else when it comes to farming, is expensive. That was another thing I was naïve about. Tractors and combines I would expect to cost a lot of money. Land of course is expensive. But seed? Certainly the seed would be as cheap as those packets you’d find in a hardware store for your smaller home gardens. Not true. Seed is precious and expensive. Seed would never be wasted. So, let’s look at the farmer or “sower” in our Gospel lesson. The Gospel lesson for this week is 15 verses long, two different sections of Matthew chapter 13, the first the parable of the sower and the second it’s explanation. But really it’s all summed up in just a few short words. Jesus says “A sower went out to sow.” Period. It is the end of that particular thought. But here’s the question for us to ponder, whether we know a lot about agriculture or not. What kind of sower, is Jesus describing, here in this parable?

 First, let’s make sure that we all remember what a parable is. A parable was a means of Jesus teaching the people and the disciples. Very simply, a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. The earthly story is not difficult to understand. Very simply put sowing can be defined as spreading seed in order that it grows. A sower takes seed and plants it, but that’s where the confusion comes in when we think about the expensive cost of seed, and how it relates to this parable. What kind of sower, sows in the way that Jesus is describing here? Jesus goes on to say that this sower went out and sowed on the path, and on the rocky ground, and on the thorns. He seems to be sowing everywhere! It seems like he’s just absentmindedly throwing seed around like a candy thrower at a parade, or those who would throw rice at a wedding. He spreads it everywhere, even in places where it would have no chance of growing. What kind of sower, would think so little of his seed, to spread this expensive and precious seed in such a reckless way?

 A farmer wouldn’t last very long if they continually wasted their seed. It’s certainly not how sowing goes today. Sowing isn’t something that is done without any thought, sowing has to be done with precision. Sowing is done by making sure that precious seeds are given every opportunity to grow. They are cultivated in the best soil. They are prepared by removing rocks, thorns, weeds, and any other thing that would be detrimental to that seed growing. Another fun agriculture fact that I learned, was that you didn’t just pay for seed as a farmer you also paid to spray. You may think the cost in your life as a farmer was tied only to the equipment you need to bring it in, and a little bit for seed, but the reality is, the life of your crop was so precious that you would plant, and then spray chemicals on the budding plants in order to keep them safe from bugs. There was a whole market in the preservation of the expensive seed and people who would go around and sell just the sprays.

 So why does this sower sow in this way? After all, this parable is summed up in just these words, “a sower went out to sow.” And we know with certainty that what He is sowing is not just useless seed, or an inexpensive seed, but as Isaiah says in chapter 55, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower, and bread to the eater, so shall *my word* be that goes out from my mouth.” The Word of God’s prophet is described as seed. And what the prophet Isaiah speaks is the Word of God. Jesus clarifies to us without a shadow of a doubt in His explanation that what was sown on the path, and on the rocky ground, and in the thorns, and on the good soil is His word. This sower is not sowing a useless seed, but a seed that is powerful and effective. A seed that as Isaiah goes on to say will not return to Him empty or void. It is a precious thing that the sower spreads out in the soil, more precious than a hundred million seeds of the most expensive seed that any farmer could own. It is the inspired Word of the Son of God, come down from heaven to this sinful Earth, spreading the truth of His Gospel to save sinful man from themselves.

 Yet the seed is wasted. Wasted on rocky ground, on fake and false Christians filled with enthusiasm but with no depth to hear God’s Word preached. The seed is cultivated for a time and then at the first sign of persecution or trouble, the plant dies, the seed is wasted. The seed is sown on paths where it is susceptible to predators such as birds and Jesus describes that this is the work of the evil one, the devil, who comes and tempts, steals, and destroys. The seed even falls among thorns, where it is strangled and snuffed out. As Paul states in Romans 8 in our Epistle lesson, “If you live according to the flesh you will die”. Those thorns are the epitome of a life that is lived for the pleasures of this world. Jesus describes the thorns as the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches that choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. Those thorns are the worries and cares of a world that is perishing. Thorns were the curse that God gave man for falling into sin, and therefore they are evidence that we live in a fallen creation. Thorns and weeds are always detrimental to the growing of seed and so it is with faith. When the thorns and weeds of this world continue to grow around us, there is no way that our faith can grow when it is boxed in and suffocated by our sinful desires.

 The seed is precious, yet the sower wastes it on unsuitable ground. For that is what we are in this parable. We are soil that is not worthy to be planted in. Do you have any idea what land judging is? I think the youth always enjoyed me asking questions about agriculture because I had the knowledge of a kindergartner when it came to this sort of stuff. In our youth group we had two boys who were on the land judging team, and actually were some of the best land judgers in the entire state of Kansas. Now again, this is my understanding of it as I’ve never judged any land, or owned any land, but land judging is where you determine how good a particular land’s soil is for planting. If we were land that was being judged, we would be the worst kind of soil to plant in. We are soil that does not deserve the precious seed that the sower brings. Any farmer can understand that if you have a field that is not suitable for growing crops, you don’t waste your seed on it. We are sinful and fallen soil. We are corrupted and surrounded by the thorns and the thistles of our sinful desires and the cares of this world. We are filled with enthusiasm like a rocky and shallow ground for a while yet we fall away when God doesn’t do everything we want him to do. We are tempted by the evil one, who comes and seeks to destroy us. We are not worthy of God’s Word or forgiveness.

 So again, I ask you, What kind of sower is Jesus describing in this parable? A modern day farmer would probably say a foolish one, because He wastes His expensive seed on unsuitable ground, but the answer is simple. The sower shows his nature in the fact, that this sower simply goes out to sow. He goes out to sow without an agenda. He simply sows and it’s the seed of God’s Word that is powerful and effective. The sower shows His love for us in the fact that He sows with reckless abandon, and sows on the path, the rocky ground, the thorns, and good soil. He spreads His Word to everyone, just as He sent His Son to die for the sins of everyone. For we all are unsuitable soil. We all are filled with thorns and are not able to grow the seed of God’s Word on our own. We are not able to create faith in our own hearts or earn for ourselves forgiveness of sins. But it is the seed that does the work. Seed spread by the sower, who sows it upon all of us. While this sower may seem foolish to waste such a precious seed on unsuitable ground, we see His love in the fact that He spreads that word to the entire world, and we know without a shadow of a doubt, that this seed, this Word of God, will not return to Him empty, but instead will create faith in the most unlikely of places, and make good soil that will yield an amazing and abundant crop.

 And just as a plant that grows from a seed then produces its own seeds and sends them out throughout the world either by the work of a sower or the wind that blows, so we, who have been created and grown by the work of the Sower, God our Heavenly Father, take His seed; His Word, out into this world, to sow ourselves. The beauty of our work as sowers of God’s Holy and righteous seed, is that we don’t need to concern ourselves about the nature in which we sow. If anything we are imitators of the one who sowed the seed of faith in our hearts that has grown into life everlasting through the work of His Word and His Sacraments. We can gladly go out and sow with reckless abandon just as God does. We can know with certainty that God’s Word and the work of the Holy Spirit create faith and not our own actions. There is a peace that comes with the knowledge that when we share God’s Word to those around us we are doing so out of thanksgiving to God and that it will be effective without any power or worthiness in us. It is the seed that is powerful and effective.

 The joy that is found in the parable of the sower, is that we see a perfect example of God’s love for His entire creation. We do not need to stop and consider if we are the good soil, the rocky ground, the path, or the thorns, because all that matters is that His seed has taken root and His Word has created faith in our hearts. While our sinful minds may not be able to understand why God would waste seed in such a reckless manner, and while the truth is that we are surrounded with sin in our lives, our comfort and peace come from knowing that we are saved by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came down from heaven and became man, who sat and reclined in a boat to teach the crowds, and His disciples, and us the truth of His Word. Jesus Christ, who then went to the cross and died to take away the sins of the entire world. Jesus came and died for those tempted by the evil one who reside on the path, for those with a shallow and superficial faith, and for those who are choked by the thorns, to redeem them from destruction, and to put to death the deeds of their sinful flesh so that they will live. As Isaiah beautifully writes “instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle” Instead of death we have been given life. Instead of worry we have been given peace. May that peace remain with you, as you meditate on the parables of Jesus Christ, and the heavenly meanings that reveals His love. May you be reminded of that peace and that love of God whenever you go out into the fields to sow seeds as a sower of God’s Word to those around you.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.