

GOD'S GOOD GROUND

It is ground that is prepared by the Holy Spirit
It is ground that produces the fruits of repentance.

Luke 8:4-15

TEXT: *While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, "though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand." "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

It is so hard for us, no, it's impossible for us to grasp the meaning of this parable that our Lord uses concerning the four kinds of soil unless a person is given, as Jesus often said following one of his parables, ears to hear: ***He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*** The Bible says: ***His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, "though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand."*** Then Jesus told them: ***This is the meaning of the parable...***

Today we are blessed to study the meaning of the important truths of this parable because God has graciously given you "ears to hear," and eyes of faith to see these important truths. For you are GOD'S GOOD GROUND, prepared by the Holy Spirit; and, ground that produces the fruits of repentance.

Jesus speaks of four kinds of ground upon which the precious seeds being sown by the farmer land. They are: THE PATH, upon which some seeds fell only to be trampled upon and crushed to death by the feet of travelers, or quickly plucked up by the beaks of hungry birds; THE ROCKY soil that could not support or nourish the tender plants that sprouted from the seeds; THE THORNS and weeds that choked off the tender shoots that sprung from the seeds. And THE GOOD GROUND, that is good because it is the power and work of the farmer who works it up into good ground, picks the rocks and spreads the manure to fertilize and make things grow so that, as Jesus says: ***other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.***

Then Jesus immediately declares: ***"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*** And when: ***His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, "though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand."*** Here is revealed again what is called the Doctrine of Election, or Predestination. It is the truth to which Paul refers when he writes: ***... no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.*** 1 Co 12

And what the Church means when in Luther's Small Catechism we declare: **I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way, he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.** God is the farmer who creates the good soil upon which the seed of his Word falls, and grows in to a healthy plant that produces fruit.

So, what is the purpose of this parable, the meaning of which can only be understood by those who have been called to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit, that is, to those who are God's Elect? And why does the

Lord even speak to his disciples about seed falling on unproductive ground, the kind that symbolizes those who despise God's Word and lose their faith?

The answer is in the fact that God's Holy Spirit works through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, and that we who are his disciples, the Good Ground in which the Word has taken root and brings forth the fruits God wants, will not neglect it ourselves but will elevate it to life's highest priority.

Jesus' disciples asked Jesus what the parable meant, so he told them: ***The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.*** You and I can think of many who sadly fall into one or another of these examples. How sad it is to know someone who was baptized, grew up in the Word, took Communion with us, but then fell away for some of the reasons cited by our Lord. Satan snatches the Word and faith from their hearts. The worries and cares of the world caused faith to diminish and disappear. These things, plus the pleasures and treasures of the world keep them from the fellowship of believers who gather around the Word and they fall into the deadly error of self-righteousness, imagining that their faith is OK without the power of God that is the Gospel. They will lose their faith and go to hell. That's what Jesus clearly teaches.

But when I hear this parable, I must wonder about myself. Am I REALLY the "good ground" of God? What if I'm not? What if I am one who might fall away? What if I'm like Jesus' disciple, Judas, who was a believer but who fell to greed and sinned by betraying Jesus, and who then lost his faith and in despair hung himself and went to hell? What if?? What if I'm one of those of whom Jesus warns when he says: ***Many will say to me on (Judgment Day), 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'*** Mt 7 How can I ever have the certainty that I am one in whom the power of the Holy Spirit has truly worked up the soil so that the Seed that is the Word of God has taken root so that I can know that I will be saved?

The irony of the truth of your Election to eternal life is in the word: REPENTANCE. And the first part of repentance is called "contrition," that is the true spiritual anxiety that is in the heart of those who take God's Law seriously. In other words, it is God's Elect, those who are God's Good Ground, who see how easily we ourselves fall to the same sins of those who are the ungodly! Should it not terrify me that I also am lazy in my spiritual life and in the daily prayers and study of God's Word? Should it not terrify me for the horrible thoughts that fill my heart and mind as Satan and the ungodly set before me countless temptations? It's not just the prostitutes, the gays and lesbians who are full of lust, when Jesus says: ***I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.*** Mt 5 I've neither gouged out an eye nor cut off a hand, so you people are probably saying, "Our pastor has neither lusted nor stolen, nor raised his hand in anger against anyone! See he still has his eyes and hands and says that he is a Christian! How can anyone of us ever stand before the Lord and his Church and declare that we are members of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints?

What liars we are! But how true is God's promise that in Christ's perfect life and his innocent suffering and death the sin of mankind has been paid for and atoned! Let all men be liars and let God be true!

And so, it remains that the Gospel in Word and Sacrament remain the only source of comfort and assurance for those who are God's Good Ground. And it is repentance that is the fruit of saving faith, the fruit that the Lord looks for in the hearts of all men, women and children! And the fruit of repentance is identified by its fear and terror of the sin that is ours, and it's joyful confidence that God has, in Christ, reconciled the world to him, including each of us. For God, has claimed you and made you to be his GOOD GROUND.

Amen