

God's Tool Box

(God gives us all we need to do his work)

Texts: Genesis 25:19-34

Romans 8:1-11 (Series A. 6th Sunday after Pentecost) Ps.119:105-112

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Let us pray:

**Gracious God - bless now the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts.
Breathe your Spirit into us, and grant that we may hear and, in hearing,
be led in the way you want us to go. Amen.**

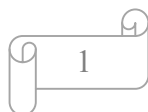
Base concept: Here is a toolbox with various items in it. Now think about how useful each tool is. Transition: if God had a tool box in which God kept the tools he needed to do his work, what would he put into it? (*A moment of reflection*)

Conclusion: We are God's tools. God uses us to do his work. The love, the patience, the creativity, and the forgiveness he gives to us are meant for us to use within the world.

There is a growing trend in our society, today, to classify people according to their personality types, as if we are trying to find a niche for every itch. For example, in the world of advertising, there is a theory that divides people into different groups based on their supposed lifestyles. According to one theory of classification, two of these groups are the "*belongers*" and the "*achievers*".

"*Belongers*" are middle-class people who want the best of the best. Therefore, to sell a product to people in this group, an advertiser will stress that the product is the most popular product of its kind. That same pitch would not work with a group of "achievers," however. "*Achievers*," according to the theory, are financially successful people who would not want to buy the most popular product. They only want to own things that most people can't afford.

Jesus knew that people were different. So, he told a parable: "Listen!" he said, "A sower went out to sow. And, as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground where they did not have much soil; they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil but when the sun rose, they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."



Later, as we know from our reading of the gospel today, Jesus interpreted this parable for his disciples. His interpretation tells us that different kinds of people respond to the gospel in different ways. Some do not understand the gospel; the pathway in their heart is too hard for the seed to bury itself and develop roots, so the seed is snatched away by the first critter that comes along.

Some receive the word with joy but the soil of their heart is too rocky, therefore the word endures in their lives for only a short time; it never develops the roots that it needs to survive hard times - the times when it seems that faith might cost us something a bit more than simply saying "*I believe*" - that it might actually cost us our wholehearted trust.

Still others, Jesus tells us, allow God's Word to be choked out by the cares of this world, by the lure of wealth or power or prestige or by their constant neglect of those things needed for growth - the pruning back of activities that crowd the most important activities we can indulge in - the hearing of the word, prayer, and the fellowship of other believers.

And then, of course, there is the good soil - the folk who hear the word and understand it; those who indeed bear fruit and yield, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. What kind of soil are you? How do you respond to the seed that is cast into your life?

The summer of 1981, I did summer mission work in Water Hen Lake, near Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, among First Nation people. When autumn arrives, and the cold northern wind begins to blow southward, it is duck season. It is so beautiful to watch the different kinds of big birds such as Canada geese on their way south, loons, and mallards etc.

Two particular ducks caught my attention: the *Mallards* and the *Redhead* or *Canvasback* ducks. Mallard ducks will paddle around in shallow water and feed on the marsh grasses growing there. But then, there are the *Redhead* or *Canvasback* ducks; these are diving ducks. They dive to great depths to feed on plants growing on the bottom of the lake. One day, as I was watching the ducks feed, I thought to myself, in some ways, Christians are like those ducks. Some are paddle ducks, satisfied with the nourishment they find in the shallows of the Christian life. Others are divers; they plunge deeply into the Word of God, through study, reflection, meditation, and participation in the life and ministry of their church. The Word yields a rich return in their lives.

People are different. People respond to the Gospel in different ways. How do we respond to the Word of God, and to the various Acts of God, in our lives? What kind of soil are we?

- ❖ Do we allow trials and tribulations of this world to overwhelm the tender seed growing within us? Do we pull back when people harass us because we are believers? Do we decide that, because things are not working out the way we think they ought to, God doesn't care for us - that He is powerless and weak and not to be heeded?
- ❖ Do we allow the cares of this world - our ambitions and our desires for success and happiness - to choke out the messages that God sends us, through the various events of our daily lives and through the various people we encounter?
- ❖ Or, to mix the metaphor a bit, do we dive to the depths of the Word that we have received? How we respond to the Word of God is key to how fruitful the gospel is going to be in our lives.

And, unlike the situation in nature in which seed and various kinds of soil encounter each other, we do have control over how we receive and respond to the gospel message; we can, as it were, change the kind of soil that we are.

We are not passive receivers of the Gospel; at least, we don't have to be. We have power over how we respond to the Gospel. God has given us this tremendous freedom to either say, "Yes" or "No". God has also given us the freedom and the power to have hearts that are fruitful for him or hearts in which the word is quickly *snatched* away or quickly *withers* and dies.

When we think about it, there is a lot to be said for calling today's parable, "The Parable of the Seed." Yet, for centuries, it has been known as the "Parable of The Sower," and I think I know why; I think it has been called the "Parable of the Sower" because this title focuses our attention on just what it is that God does and how gracious he is in it.

You see, there are many seeds that God casts into our lives, and all of them are meant to land in good soil and to produce abundant fruit. But, as any farmer knows, some seeds are going to fall in places where they simply will not thrive. Knowing this, however, does not prevent the farmer from sowing the seed; nor does it prevent him from praying for and expecting a good crop.

When God deals with us, God deals with us even more generously than does the best farmer. God allows the seed to land on the hard paths and the rocky ground and in the thickets of our lives: in the hope that, in those places, it will find a place to mature and bear fruit; in the hope that those things which impede growth will be removed; in the hope that the soil might be just a little deeper than it appears to be, at first, in those rocky places.

I know a middle-aged couple whose lives were, until recently, a total mess; the man was a heavy drinker and, at times, abusive towards his wife and intolerant of his children. Religion to him was absurd; talk about Jesus was nonsense and to be avoided at all cost. The woman, in turn, was angry and bitter and had little good to say about her husband, her job or her life. She had no hope, and she let people know it. Neither of them seemed to be very good soil.

The cares and the troubles of this world were heavy upon them. Their goals and ambitions - to be successful in business; to have children who achieved at school and in sports - were all they cared about. To put the matter quite simply, their values and their lifestyle seemed to preclude any chance that the Word of God could enter their hearts and lives.

Yet, God planted seed in their lives. They came to know that they needed help to save their marriage. And, one day, after an ugly fight, they asked for help - from a pastor. And, he told them that what they needed was Jesus Christ in their lives. And, that one seed, amongst all the others that had been cast their way over the years, took hold in a little bit of rich soil that existed amongst all the *rocky* ground and *hard* paths and *thickets* which composed their lives.

I stand here as witness before you, this morning, and tell you that *one, just one seed* has already yielded a hundredfold - that ground upon which all the other seed previously perished *is even now being transformed*.

This couple plunged to the depths of the word that they finally accepted, and, in so doing, their whole lives are being changed. Praise God for the miracle of growth and salvation he performs! And for his healing love!

God does not discriminate between the good ground and the bad ground, when he goes forth to sow. God accepts the fact that some of the seed will be *snatched* away, that some of it will grow quickly and then *wither*, that some of it will be *strangled* - but he sows anyway.

So, we ought to sow the word of God's love as generously as God sows. So we ought to trust that what we sow will, in the end, produce a harvest:

- even when it appears that there is little chance for it.
- even when it appears that every inch of ground is worthless.

Today's parable is a farmer's parable; it is a parable about a *sower* and about *seed* and what happens to it. Its message for us is that there is always hope for a harvest; its message is that we should not discriminate in our sowing of God's seed, that while there are many kinds of people - and many kinds of soil - ultimately the seed that God sows, and the seed we cast in God's name, will produce - some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

By the way, one more tool we should put in the tool box is "*We do the possible and let God do the impossible.*"

**We are God's tools. He uses us to do his work. The love, to do justice and show kindness; the patience, the creativity, and the forgiveness he gives to us, we are meant to use within the world.
Amen.**

My sisters and brothers in Christ, let all take time to pray, to encourage and to call one another in the household of faith and ALL nurses, doctors, truck drivers, all essential workers etc. I would like to take this opportunity to say, "Many THANKS," to all members and friends of St. Ansgar's for their generous and continued support during this COVID-19 pandemic. Have a blessed week.

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Christ, Be Our Light # 715
- Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love # 708
- O Zion, Haste # 668

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