

We are 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.
Breath 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. Show forth a toolbox and various items in it. Talk about how useful each is. Transition: if God had a tool box in which he kept the tools he needed to do his work, what would he put into it? (Invite some responses)

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

There is a growing trend in our society today to classify people according to 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 would not shop at Walmart. They only want to own things that most people can't afford.

Jesus knew that people are 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, and 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, Jesus explained 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 difficulty that comes along.

Some receive the word with joy - but the soil of their heart is too rocky - and so the word endures 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*" they bolt out.

Still others, Jesus tells us, allow the God's Word to be choked out by the cares of this world, by the enticement of wealth or power or prestige - or constant neglect of those things needful for growth - 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, 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 a summer mission work in Water Hen Lake near, Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan among First Nation people. As autumn arrives, and the cold northern wind begins blow southward.

It is duck season. It is so beautiful to watch the different kinds of big birds, such as Canada gees on their way south, Loon, and mallards etc. Two particular ducks caught my attention the *Mallards*, and *Redhead* ducks. Mallard ducks will paddle around in shallow water and feed on the marsh grasses growing there.

But then, there are the Redhead 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 these duck feed, I thought to my self in some ways, Christians are like those ducks.

Some Christians are puddle ducks, satisfied with the nourishment they find in the shallows of the Christian life. Others are divers. They plunge deeply into the Word through study, reflection, meditation, and participation in the life and ministry of their church. The word yields a rich return in their personal 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 decide that because things are not working out the way we think they ought - that 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 it might be fruitful in our lives? How we respond to the Word of God is key to how fruitful the gospel is going to be in our lives.

There is this hymn I learnt in Middle school: *Will your anchor hold in the storm of life?* And, unlike the situation in nature, 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 by God's grace.

We are not passive receivers of the Gospel - And in saying either "Yes" or "No", God also has given us the freedom and the power to have hearts that are open to him - or hearts in which the word is quickly *snatched* away or quickly *withers* and dies.

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. 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 *thorns* 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.

I know a couple in their middle age whose lives were, until recently, a total mess. He was a heavy drinker and abusive at times towards his wife and cannot stand his children. Religion to him was absurd - especially talk about Jesus - was nonsense and to be avoided at all cost.

She, in turn, was *angry, bitter, hard nose* and had little good to say about her husband, her job, or her life. She had no hope and miserable 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 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 live.

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 the Lutheran pastor 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 *thorns* which composed their lives.

I stand here 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 - *it 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 *choked*, and but God 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. (The story of *Mission work in Ada, Ghana*.)

Today's parable is and its message for us - is that, there is 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.

We are not the sword-carriers, we are bearers of the Word, the Good News. And some days will be easier than others. But this is not a part-time occupation, a Sunday thing, or a Christmas and Easter duty. This is what we sign up for when we call ourselves Followers of Christ. We become a tool box for Christ. It is *newness of life*. The pay-off is full-time, eternal life.

A dandelion can flower in all manner of groundings, and a desert will erupt in blooms with the slightest moisture. Whenever the Word penetrates our hearts, we must try, try again to clear the rocks, cut back the thorns, and cultivate those deep roots that are the ground of our being; to be fruitful and multiply the good yields of our soul, to belong to Christ Jesus again and forever.

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

Amen.

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