July 16, 2023 **A HOUSE DIVIDED**

Earlier to the event of our gospel passage for this Sunday from St. Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23 the family members of Jesus Christ, his mother and brothers had come to look for him. Their intent was probably to try and persuade him to stop his preaching and teaching, which is going to cost him his life. In verse one we read “That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.” A large crowd was standing by him, though the religious leaders of Jesus' days were often trying to trap him and kill him, the common people were fascinated by his teachings.

The crowd was so great on this occasion that he got into a boat to teach. As the crowd stood on the beach, Jesus began to tell them a parable, a normal style of teaching of Jesus. Jesus tells of a farmer who went out to sow the seeds. Farming was the way of life for many people during Jesus’s time. The farmer would sling the seed bag over his shoulder, walk up and down the furrows of his field and scatter the seeds. Using this method of sowing, we can understand that it was impossible to control where the seed fell. Jesus tells of four kinds of soil upon which the seed fell.

The first type of soil was the ground beside the road. This road was a path that separated fields. It was walked on by the farmers as they made their way between the fields and by travelers as they traveled from one part of the country to another. We can compare it to the part of our gardens located between the rows of crops. As we walk on that part of the garden, over time it will get hard. The roads Jesus speaks of were not plowed. Because of the traffic, the dirt was packed down hard. When the seed fell on this soil, it could not penetrate. Therefore, it would not take root and grow. Being exposed as it was, it was common for the birds to plunge down and devour them.

The second type of soil Jesus mentions was rocky soil. This does not mean that the soil was full of rocks. The farmer would have removed such rocks. Jesus refers to a bed of solid rock that lay just below where the plow of the farmer would reach. The soil that covered this bed of limestone rock was very shallow in depth. The seeds that fell here would spring up quickly, but since the roots of the plant could not penetrate very deeply the plant would soon wither.

The third type of soil was infested with thorns. This ground had been cultivated and looked good, but it wasn’t. When the seed sprouted, so did the thorns. The final type of soil was the good soil. This was the ground that had been plowed and was loose and soft. It was also deep enough for the plants to grow. Here the seed would grow well.

Jesus tells us that seed sown in good soil will have miraculous yields. So, as we talk of being persistent in understanding and attentiveness so that God’s seed can grow in us, we must also realize that the yields of God’s harvest are so miraculous because, ultimately, all growth comes from God. Faith is a gift from God, and fruitful discipleship is the work of God in us when we open ourselves to him. Though God seems to scatter the seeds only and not tend to them, that is not the case.

Like the attentive farmer who prepares the soils and then plants and waters and weeds until the harvest, God the Sower spreads his seeds far and wide, and through his unconditional love and prevenient grace cares for each one with the hopes that it will take root and bear fruit. One of the signs of fruit in our lives, one of the greatest signs that the seed of God’s kingdom is growing inside us, is that we are out in the world scattering the seed of God’s Word everywhere. If we are truly Christ’s disciples, then like the Sower in the parable, we go out to sow the seeds through which God will work in the people of this world. And if we are not doing this, then it is just as if our seed has been plucked up by a bird, or scorched by the sun, or choked out by weeds and thorns.

How does your garden grow? Is the soil bad? Or are you cultivating a place where the seed of God’s kingdom can take root and bear a fruitful harvest? As we tend to the soil of our lives, may we also see that what we do has ramifications for the whole world. For God needs us out in the world, out there, sowing the seed of God’s kingdom all around! If you would like to learn more about the parables of Jesus Christ, please join us in our worship on Sundays at 11:00 AM

Peace!

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister