

Mark 4:1-9

1 Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 3 "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." 9 And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

I pointed out last week that the Bible shows a contrast between the crowd and the disciples. The crowd is superficial, not at all devoted, and the disciples are a few that are devoted to Jesus, his teaching, and his mission. This is a valuable contemporary lesson for us because it is applicable in our society today. I have found in studying the Bible that there is a parallelism between the Bible and life today in our contemporary society. We are called to be disciples but we live in the world of the crowd. The majority of the people claim to be Christian but the majority do not practice their faith and only a few are devoted enough to actually join in the mission of Jesus. The Gospel of Mark informs us that when Jesus appointed the apostles it was for a specific purpose; to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim the message (Mark 3:14). To be with him is much more than just being with him physically. It is a matter of being with him in spirit; being one with Jesus. It means you don't just follow him like the crowd does, you follow his teaching and his action; his living example. Once again there is a big difference between being in the crowd and being a disciple. The crowd follows Jesus when they want to, when they perceive some benefit, but a disciple is devoted to Jesus.

I think today's Scripture is one of the most profound parables. Every aspect of the parable is applicable to ministry today. Once again Jesus is by the seaside and the crowd is a very large crowd, so large that Jesus has to get back into a boat. But now we find Jesus teaching in parables. From the gospels we can discern that it is only those who actually want to hear what Jesus has to say that will be able to interpret the message. In order to understand the meaning of the parables you have to pay attention and think, be sincere in your listening efforts and focused on his teaching. Therefore, only the true followers will be able to get what he is talking about. The parable is stated as a person that is out sowing seed. Some of the seed landed on the path and the birds ate it up. Some seed fell on some rocky ground and withered away. Some seed fell into the thorns and got choked out. Some seed fell in the good soil and was productive. The lesson lies in the interpretation of the parable. The seed represents the word of God and each of the four scenarios represents our response to it. The parable is about the word of God and our response to it. We have all received the word of God but we have different responses. I see over, and over, and over again in contemporary society how this parable is applicable to the life of the church. There are multiple theories, lots of books written, workshops, and classes, that attempt to explain the reasons for decline in mainstream protestant churches. However, my perspective is that Jesus said it best here in this parable.

One example that I know of is a young couple that wanted to get married. They found out that we don't charge members for weddings. So, they joined the church, confessed their belief but never made a commitment. They got married and we didn't see them again. They don't consider how God feels about them using God's temple for their own will instead of God's will. They never had a chance because they never gave God a chance. The seed fell on the path. They heard the word but Satan has taken the word away from them.

There are many people that I know that had regular attendance and were active participants. They were faithful but when conflict rears its ugly head they gave up. You never see them in church again. The seed fell on rocky ground. They heard the word and received it with joy but when trouble arises they immediately fall away.

The parable of the sower explains why we have a generation that is lost today. It applies to our friends, neighbors, relatives, and our own children. I think our biggest problem today in regards to decline in church attendance is identified right here in this parable where the seed fell into the thorns. The cares of the world, the lure of wealth and the desire for other things has come in and choked out the word. We have become a me first society, a selfish society, where the majority of the people desire other things than the word of God.

Jesus calls disciples away from the crowd, to be close to him, to learn from him, to proclaim his message, and to continue his mission. This is the seed that fell on the good soil. This seed is productive. This is who we are to be. Once again the lesson is all about the word of God and our response to it. There is a huge contrast between the crowd and the disciples. This most profound parable is applicable to us today. The seed that fell in the path represents someone that is enthusiastic at first, they hear the word of God but Satan takes the word away. The seed that fell on the rocky ground is active and participates but falls away when conflict comes along. The seed fell in the thorns represents those that are not devoted because the lure of wealth chokes out their faith. The seed that fell in the good soil represents the few that are productive. They are devoted to Jesus, continue his mission, and never fall away.