

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

Text: St. Luke viii. 4.

WHEN much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, he that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

This morning on this second Sunday before Lent, I bring you greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior as He asks each of us if we have ears that hear. AMEN

So much that is contained in the Bible is confusing that whenever we hear our Lord speak something so clearly, we wonder if we miss the point. This morning's Gospel is one of those lessons. It is so very clear to us in what is being said as Christ explains what each part of this parable means.

First, the seed is the Word of God. This is most certainly the word contained in Scripture and the words He spoke to us throughout the Gospels. Such clear directions such as "You shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind and with all thy soul", and of course "Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself." When asked what work does God expect of us, He said "That you should believe on Him who God has sent." So the word of God is certainly clear, in the preaching of the Gospel, in our desire to bring God into everyone's lives, in the sharing of our faith.

Our Lord continues: "Those by the wayside are those who hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved." These are the ones who hear what is being preached by faithful Christians and turn away. They hear the words of Christ, see what is in scripture and listen to those who preach the Gospel and just turn away. Our Lord says something very profound here, "then cometh the devil". The subject of the devil could fill a book of sermons but suffice it to say today that he exists, he works to rob us of our faith and it is his desire that we should not be saved. This is what Christ tells us.

Then Christ speaks of those "on the rock...when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in the time of temptation fall away." There is no one more enthusiastic than a new convert. He or she embraces the faith. Their lives seem to change and a spirit of renewal is in them. But when the world's pleasures or temptations rear up again, they go back to their old habits. The Bibles which they read with joy each day, begin to gather dust. They stop coming to church and you don't hear from them anymore. Even more difficult to understand are those who come to church but move on because they don't like the sermon, or the music,

or the service, or the priest. They hop from church to church, looking for something that they enjoy, as if the purpose of worship was to please them.

“And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.” You know the type. They make every effort to be faithful, try to devote themselves to a full spiritual life yet when the world’s troubles hit, or they see the politics around them, even in the church, or face the cold hard facts of the world, they falter. God is forgotten. Set aside. They try to do it on their own, they try to depend on themselves and they fail.

And finally, there is the seed that falls on good ground. Those “which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience.” That’s the one I want to be-good fertile ground, hearing the word, sharing it with others, being faithful to God in all things. Yet, to be fertile ground, is the hardest task of all.

We can relate to each of these categories that our Lord places those who hear the word in. Each of us has been in each of these places in our lives. So let us ask ourselves the critical question. How do we get to, and stay in fertile ground?

First, we must always trust in God to help us along and be willing to accept His help. Christ knew we would often fail in our journey of faith. That is why He died on the cross for us, to bring us to salvation and remove the burden of our sins. As we are justified by our faith, we are called upon to make sure our faith is real and the focus of our life remains on Christ, with our full commitment, expressed in our love for Him.

Second, we must have a full spiritual life. We must seek God in our devout and regular worship with those who likewise come to church to praise and thank God for His generosity, caring and love. We must also seek God in our prayer life, talking with Him daily, seeking guidance and expressing our gratitude for all He gives us. That prayer life is expressed in our conversations with Him, regular daily devotions, taking the time to listen and with a penitent heart. We must come to God in our humility and sin and ask Him for His forgiveness and the strength to overcome our weaknesses. And we must also seek God through His word. The study of Scripture *is* His revelation to us. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God will speak to us as we read His word and look for its meaning in our lives. Worship, the individual prayer life and Scripture all open our hearts to God and help us set aside the things of the world.

Finally, we must gather the seeds that have fallen on the wayside, on the rock and among the thorns and move those seeds to fertile ground. We must witness to our faith, share the Gospel as Christ commanded us, and express our Christ like love to all whom we touch in our lives. Sharing the joy in Jesus Christ is sharing His gift to the world, even to those who do not want to hear.

The temptations of the world are strong, the power of the devil is overwhelming. Yet the road to the cross is a journey with a wonderful destination that gives us hope. In that

journey, we may often times find ourselves on the shoulder or even in the ditch, but God's faithfulness to us, and our trust in Him, sets our feet back on the path. As we approach Lent, let each of us seek to strengthen our relationship with God, setting aside the world and looking to our Lord's sacrifice for us on the cross and letting our hearts open up to the love Christ showed for us when He died for us at Calvary. We pray that God will find in each of us, a fertile soul, nurtured by His Holy Spirit, and fruitful in Christian love. AMEN