

Matthew 13:1-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear.” ¹⁰ The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” ¹¹ He replied, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. ¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “ ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. ¹⁵ For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ ¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷ For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it. ¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. ²² The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Verse of the Day: 2 Timothy 3:15

Alleluia. From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Alleluia.

Sermon:

I decided to ask Google a few questions this week. What is the most common workplace problem? What is the most common relationship problem? What is the most common personal problem? Can you guess the answers?

- What is the most common workplace problem? Answer: poor communication
- What is the most common relationship problem? Answer: poor communication
- What is the most common personal problem? Answer: Ah, I threw you a curve ball. It was finances but following closely behind ... yep, poor communication stressing out marriages, friendships, and professional relationships. Go figure.

Communication is consistently ranked in the top 5 problems we face in general as humanity. Personally, I think that's enough evidence to suggest that when it comes to communication, there isn't an expert among us. We all have our shortcomings. We all have our sins. Yes, I think we can classify our communication into that category especially given the large body of passages that

address our speech and our interaction with one another. It even receives its own commandment as God urges us to stay away from giving false witness, slander, or participating in gossip. Jesus Himself commands us to talk to one another, especially in the presence of our problems in Matthew chapter 18, just 5 chapters after the words of our lesson today.

Interestingly enough, while we more than likely have our collective failings when it comes to communication, our God never does. And as it would just so happen, the parable of the Sower and the Seed is all about communication, communication with God. And so, as we contemplate God's perfect communication with His people today, as He moves onto the water to amplify His voice for the crowds who have gathered, He wants them to listen as He chides, ***"He who has ears, let him hear!"***

I will forever remember the wisdom a professor laid out for us at seminary over 20 years ago now. "Boys, God gave you two ears and one mouth for a reason. What do you suppose we should learn from that?" While such a statement has plenty to say about our interactions with one another, it also speaks volumes when it comes to our communication with God.

In our parable, the seed of God's Word falls upon the path and the stoney soil and among the thorns. Jesus says these are the foes of satan, the world, and our own sinful flesh. Yes, satan may snatch the Word of God away, the troubles of the world may crowd it out, and the worries of our own flesh may mute the very voice of God in our lives. This of course is a massive problem. For where the Word of God is not heard, well in all three cases faith is either snatched away or dies.

Now of course, when we hear this parable, we often slot others in these categories because we after all have faith, so we are good soil, or so we want to believe. The reality is that all three save perhaps the first had faith, it sprouted up and looked good, but it was snatched, it was scorched, it was strangled out because of a failure to hear. May this never be!

Dear friends, in such cases, we need God's Law to tear up the soil of our hearts, throw aside the stones, and eradicate the weeds. God says get rid of the noise of sin or else ... well, the disciples asked why parables and Jesus replied, *"Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand."*¹⁴ *In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: " 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. "*¹⁵ *For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them. '"* These are some of the most frightening Word in all of Scripture. May we not skip over three-fourths of the parable but take heed to the warning Jesus gives for the Word is a gift and when tossed aside, well the gift can be gone.

I hear the phrase a ton, and in truth I'm glad I do. "Pastor, I've been praying long and hard on this and now, I've come to the conclusion that (fill in the blank)." Again, I am glad that we are talking to God. He tells us to, even wants to hear our voices raised in thanksgiving and praise, concern and confusion, but I wonder if it often falls into the category of poor communication. Let me explain. I know personally, I open my mouth plenty to my God. I say plenty. But then God gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason. Am I just talking or am I listening as well?

You see it's that second part that makes all the difference. Way back in the days before seminary, when I had very few concerns because mom and dad took care of all of them, I remember a prayer used regularly in worship. "Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."

Jesus says it just a little differently today, ⁸ *Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.* ⁹ *He who has ears, let him hear.*” ¹⁰ *The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”* ¹¹ *He replied, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.* ¹² *Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.* ¹³ *This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.* ¹⁴ *In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “ ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.* ¹⁵ *For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’* ¹⁶ *But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.* ¹⁷ *For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.*

Again, God is the perfect communicator. Do you hear it? “Blessed are your eyes” and “blessed are your ears” why because they see and they hear. God has chosen passive instruments of the body to communicate this truth for us. Another way of saying it is that ears and eyes are little more than receptors of the body as a whole. They hear something and they see something. The maker of the body could have said, “Blessed are you because of your brain and your cognition. You’re so smart and just a little better than all those other soils so you are going places my friend.” Ah, but that wouldn’t be true. By nature our hearts are hard trodden down soil, too stoney and shallow for the depth of God’s instruction, too overcome with our own weedy wisdom to allow room for the wisdom of God. So, He sets His Word before our eyes and fills up our ears with it. *I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.*

Ah, yes, *“In the fullness of time, God sent His Son born of a woman born under law to redeem those under law. (Galatians 4:4)” “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* ² *He was with God in the beginning....*” ¹⁴ *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1,14)” “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)”* It’s the Gospel! Jesus was walking and talking with them, teaching them. Yes, He was living for them. Enduring the scorn of sinful men who squeezed their eyes shut and stopped up their ears until they murdered Him on a cross all so that the foes which destroy the soil of our hearts might be tilled up and tossed away. Forgiveness, Life, Salvation, I don’t want to steal too much from next week, but these are the gifts God gives through His Gospel in Word and Sacraments. Transforming us into good soil. Yes, He does everything even working faith in sinful human soil that doesn’t communicate well as the Spirit wings into us through ears God placed upon our heads and eyes He stuffed into our skulls. And that Word, well it produces fruit *a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.*

Oh, children of God, this I see and hear among you as well. In Bible Study, in the responses of worship, the hymns, in discussions afterwards and away from this place in homes and in workplaces, in kindnesses shown and comfort that is given. It’s easy to lose it all in attendance figures and budgetary numbers. It’s easy to lose it all in bad news from doctors and gravestones. It’s easy to lose it in well, troubles at work, troubles with friends, troubles at home. But God, the perfect communicator, is speaking, is working among you. And if it feels like He isn’t, well, maybe it’s time to ask what we’re listening too or letting our eyes linger on and start drinking ever more deeply from His Word. ***“He who has ears, let him hear!”*** Amen!