

“Good Seed, Good Soil, Good God”

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Matthew 13:1-9

Romans 8:1-11

There is a story about a preacher whose name was Dunn, first name Will, middle initial B. Get it? Will B. Dunn. Will B. Dunn had misplaced a book one day and he had turned the house upside down looking for it but could not find the book. They had a guest bedroom in the house. He didn't really think the book would be in there, he hardly ever went in that bedroom, but he did just the same. He started rummaging through the closet in the guest bedroom. Much to his surprise, he found a basket. In the basket were three eggs and several hundred dollars.

He took the basket to his wife and asked her about it. She was a little embarrassed but said, “I have a confession to make. Every time you preach a bad sermon I put an egg in the basket.” Will B. Dunn had been preaching for several years and there were only three eggs in the basket, so he was feeling pretty good. Then he asked his wife, “How about all the money? Where did that come from?” She said, “Every time I got a dozen eggs, I sold them.”

I hope not to lay an egg with this sermon. I think even a preacher whose wife has made a fortune selling eggs could preach about this scripture. It is a great story! Just the story in itself is a great story, but it is a great story also because it is *our* story. Last week I went into Carol's office and told her that I had an alternate title for the sermon. Instead of “Good Seed, Good Soil, Good God,” I had thought that an appropriate title might be “A Scripture for Stupid, Shallow, Selfish Christians.” Carol said, “Go with the other title.”

If you look at the explanation of the parable, however, the explanation from Jesus, you can see why I was considering the other title. The seed along the path is for those who don't understand – the stupid. The seed that has been hardened and is in rocky soil, no depth or roots – shallow. The seed that has been choked by the thorns, the distractions – selfish. A scripture for each of us for the times when we are stupid, selfish and shallow.

We all do stupid things, don't we? There's a story about two guys who were on a bicycle built for two. They were facing a steep hill. When

they finally got to the top, the guy in front was just worn out. He turned around to the guy behind him, and he didn't look that tired at all. He said, "What's the deal here?" The guy behind said, "Isn't it lucky I had my foot on the brake so we wouldn't go backwards?" I see that in marriages sometimes. Truth be told, I see that in my own marriage sometimes. A husband or a wife, either one, can throw on the brakes, just not giving all that we have. We do stupid things, all of us, don't we?

We can be shallow. We give up on each other; we give up on ourselves; we give up on God. And, we can be selfish. Perhaps one of the most misunderstood scriptures in the Bible is, "Love your neighbor as yourself." We are supposed to love ourselves, but sometimes we get so wrapped up in ourselves that we can't extend our arms to embrace another person who needs our love and God's love.

Stupid, shallow, selfish - we all do those things, but at the same time there could be another title for this scripture: "A Scripture for Serious, Stable, Servant Christians." That fits each of us at one time or another, I suppose. So we come this morning, the best and the worst of us, and the best and the worst *in* us, seeking to hear Good News, seeking hope; and there is hope in this story.

First, there is the hope of the good seed, the very best, God's own Son. God has given us good seed to scatter. God has scattered good seed and God has given us good seed to scatter in good soil. We all come this morning, each of us with our faults and shortcomings, but we all come. Every person in this sanctuary is good soil. Look again, closely, at the parable. It wasn't the soil that was bad in the path. It had just been beaten down by those who walked on the path. It was still good soil. The soil in the rocky ground was not bad soil. It was just shallow. And the soil that was choked by thorns was not bad soil, it was just choked by the thorns. It was all good soil. God has given us good soil, and there is good soil in every person, which means that the Gospel is for all. So often, it seems, in the church we have tried to reach out to that perfect couple with 2 ½ children and 1 ½ pets, and God says to us, "Nowhere in the scripture did I say that. I did say something about reaching out to the least of these." It's all good soil because it's all God's creation.

Thank God, when we came into the sanctuary today there wasn't someone with some kind of commitment meter checking to see how committed we had been this past week. The Gospel is for all. It's scattered for all to receive.

We believe in a good God who blesses us extravagantly. In this part

of the state you might not be as familiar with wheat as people in the western part of the state are. You might not know this. In the western part of the state, a yield of sometimes 20 or 25 bushels per acre is a good yield. As you come farther this way where there's more moisture, there might be 40 or even 50 bushels per acre. But do you know how much wheat you have to plant to get that? Most farmers will tell you they plant a bushel per acre, but if you push them on it, do you know what nearly all of them will say? "Well, I plant a bushel plus a little more," just as God plants a little more. We believe in a God who is good, who scatters seed everywhere, who is not selfish with where the Gospel is spread.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he said, "There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Did you hear that? No condemnation for all of those times that you have been guilty of what you failed to do or what you did that was wrong, for all of those times that you will be guilty. Hear Paul's words about a good God. "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

The cynic would say, "Well, if that's true, why is it such a jungle out there?" We know there's some truth to that. Literally, we had some hostages come home from the jungle in Colombia, but we know there are other kinds of jungles. Right now, if you live in Weleetka, Oklahoma, you're living in a jungle because you're afraid to go outside, or you're afraid for your children to go outside. Even closer to home, if we admit it, most of us would say there are parts of this city we would never dare to go because it's a jungle out there. It's not a jungle out there. That's one thing this scripture says to us. In fact, it's a garden out there. The same soil that existed in the Garden of Eden exists today. It is our choice by how we live whether we make it a garden or a jungle.

This is a story of hope. It is a story of promise. It is a story of what God has said to the world about how God will depend on the church, the body of Christ, to scatter seed. We are at a critical time in the life of our church as we undertake this We Would Be Building program, when we are saying to God and those outside the church, "We care. We believe that there is good seed and good soil and a good God."

I have a "good seed" story to share with you now. Some of you might have read in the church paper a couple of weeks ago, I wrote about a young man who came to a Pizza and Praise service. After that service, someone came to me and said that this young man wanted to accept Christ. I had noticed him already. It was hard not to notice him - bushy hair, he had difficulty walking around, some kind of disability; his clothing

was that style - his pants were closer to his knees than his waist.

I went up to the young man afterward. His girlfriend was with him. We visited for a while. I said, "Someone told me that you wanted to accept Christ as your Lord and Savior. Is that right?" He said, "Yes, I do." I said, "If that's right, you can make your confession right here and now." He said, "I want to do that." So right there in the parking lot he confessed Christ.

We had a prayer and I said, "I will call you and we will set up an appointment when you can come down to the church and be baptized." He gave me his number, I called him the next day, we set up an appointment, and he did not show up, which did not surprise me. This is a young man who has had a rough life. I don't think it would be a stretch to say there has been some kind of drug abuse involved. He has no job. He is living on Social Security Disability. He lives down at the Boulder Plaza, I found out after I took him home. I doubted if I would ever see him again, but last week I called him again and he remembered me. He said he would come up to the church at 4:00 in the afternoon. I said, "I'll go down and meet you outside, where we had the service that day," and so I waited. Four o'clock, 4:05, 4:10, 4:15 - he never showed up.

I don't want to tell you his name, but I'll give you his initials. His initials are G. C. I went back up to my office after he didn't show up, and I had barely gotten up there when the woman who was at the desk called and said, "Your friend is down here at the door." I had given her a heads up - you know we have to be careful about who we let in with all the children around. She went ahead and let him in. He had gotten a haircut since I had seen him.

He was still not dressed the best, but he had walked up here from the Boulder Plaza Apartments. It was one of those hot and humid July days. He was starting to sweat some. We went up to my office.

We visited for a while and I said, "G.C., if you want to be baptized, I can sprinkle you right here in my office." I explained to him the meaning of baptism. I said, "We usually practice baptism by immersion." I explained what it means to be laid down in the water and to join in death with Christ, then to be raised up out of the water the way Christ was raised from the tomb. I said, "I can sprinkle you right here," because I was afraid that if we had to set up another appointment for him to come here and be baptized in the baptistry I would never see him again. I said, "If you prefer we can go to the sanctuary and I can show you the baptistry." He said, "I think I'd rather be baptized in the baptistry. I'd like to get all

wet.”

So we came over here and stood out there where you're seated, and I showed him the doors up here. I said, "Would you like to go up and see the baptistry?" He said, "Yes, I would," so we went up and walked down into the baptistry. He thought he could be baptized right then. He didn't understand that it would take several hours to fill the baptistry with water, so I started talking with him about setting up an appointment when he could come again and be baptized. He said, "You know, I think I'd just as soon be sprayed."

So we returned to my office, and I got this chalice. It's a chalice that Suzanne has given to me, and of course, as all chalices do, it symbolizes much more to us because of the Christ. I put some water in the chalice, dipped my fingers in the water, and placed my fingers on G.C.'s head and said, "I baptize you now in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

Now, I know that you know in our tradition we don't usually do that. We practice baptism by immersion. So I'll explain to you what I explained to G.C. It's not the amount of water that matters as much as the amount of God's love.

I told you I wouldn't share his name with you, but I will share the nickname that I gave G.C. His nickname is "God's Child." This morning I would tell you that there are God's Children all around us, some like G.C. who are living tough lives; some who live in the best houses in Tulsa, who have no room for Christ as Lord of their lives. This story says that it is our job, it is our duty, it is our challenge as followers of Christ to scatter seed. I don't know that G.C. would ever put it this way, but I think he would agree if I said this, "You don't have to give any kind of a Bible lesson. You don't have to share a lot about your faith. All you have to say is, "Good Seed, Good Soil, Good God." Amen