

SERMON Pentecost 6 Year A Matthew 13:1-23 (NRSV) The Parable of the Sower

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears^[a] listen!"

The Purpose of the Parables

¹⁰Then the disciples came and asked him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" ¹¹He answered, "To you it has been given to know the secrets^[b] of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹²For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ¹³The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.' ¹⁴With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

'You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive.

¹⁵For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them.'

¹⁶But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

The Parable of the Sower Explained

¹⁸"Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away.^[c] ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Footnotes:

- a. [Matthew 13:9](#) Other ancient authorities add *to hear*
- b. [Matthew 13:11](#) Or *mysteries*
- c. [Matthew 13:21](#) Gk *stumbles*

Prayer:

Oh Lord, open our eye and ears so that we may see the signs you've sent us, and hear your call on our hearts, to do the work you've called us to do, here, in Killeen, Texas.

Sermon:

The Bible is a complex book.ⁱ

It was written in ancient languages
by and for ancient people,
whose lives were usually
in some sort of upheaval.

Some Christians see the Bible as Literature. Great stories.
Some Christians read the King James Bible as literal fact.

Was the universe really created in 7 solar days?
God could have if God wanted to.

Is all of humanity traceable back to just 2 people?
*Aren't all things possible with God?*ⁱⁱ

There are umpteen Bible translations into English.
But ancient Greek and Hebrew don't easily translate.
Not all Bibles perfectly agree.

Even after 17 centuries of discussion,
there is no firm agreement about which books
are the "real" Bible and which aren't.

Catholics and Protestants both claim the Holy Spirit as their guide,
But Catholics include some of the 15 apocryphalⁱⁱⁱ books.^{iv}
Protestants don't include any.^v

Is the Bible Holy?

Or is just an interesting book for study?

The Bible as Literature.

We Episcopalians^{vi} are a good blend of Protestant and Catholic.^{vii}

Like most Protestants, we read the Bible every Sunday.

We study and talk about The Old Testament^{viii},

the New Testament and the psalms.

Much of our liturgy is Catholic. It is the “work of the people”.

But it is inspired by the Bible.

All that being true,

Sometimes our Sunday readings don't tie together very well.

The readings must have been chosen by committee.

Sometimes the committee deletes parts of the assigned readings.

“Too obscure”, one person must've said.

“Not PC enough”, said another.

“Awkward and confusing”, said still another.^{ix}

So, verses 10-17 are not included in our Gospel today. ^x

The missing part is right in the middle.

Our Gospel begins with Jesus sitting on the beach,

talking with folks. That is the part you heard.

Eventually, the crowd got too big, so Jesus got into a boat,

and began to preach from a safe distance off-shore.

Apparently he was alone.^{xi}

After a while, Jesus got tired of preaching, so he stopped. ^{xii}

The part of the Gospel *that we didn't read* says that, later,
Some of Jesus students^{xiii} talked amongst themselves,
And then came up to Jesus, asking him:

“*Why did you speak to them in parables?*” ^{xiv}

What a funny question.

Jesus spoke in parables all the time.

So, what is a parable?

It's more than a clever short story.

Usually a parable makes its point by *making a comparison*.

In today's parable Jesus compares people

“who look *and do see*”, with those “who look and *don't see*.”^{xv}

The disciples were wondering about that comparison.

Let me paraphrase Jesu response:

“I have given y'all the secrets to the kingdom of heaven,
because you get it.

I haven't given those keys to the other guys because they don't. ^{xvi}

The disciples came asking questions,

because it wasn't easy to understand Jesus back then.

It still isn't easy today.

Jesus quoted Isaiah:

“They don't understand.

Seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen.” ^{xvii}

If we don't make the effort to see and to listen,
We won't ever understand Jesus. Even then it is hard work!

In seminary I used to drive a lot, from my law office in Bakersfield,
120 miles south or 120 miles north, and back again.

Early in the morning and late at night. Twice a week.

On those long commutes I listened to my Greek class lectures.
I ranted. I complained. I asked God questions.
Sometimes God answered me.

Sometimes I listened to preachers, who were 100% positive
that they had Jesus figured out.
It's like they wanted to win a wrestling match
with Jesus and the Word.

But Jesus isn't always easy to understand.
The Scriptures don't always make sense.
God doesn't always tell us what we want to hear.^{xviii}

Jesus explained his parable about the sower:
It isn't about the weed. It isn't about the sower.
It's about the soil.

*Did the seeds land on good soul or on poor soil?
Sometimes Jesus plants seeds that don't take root.*^{xix}

My job, as a human being,
as a husband and as a Daddy, and as your priest,
is to be good soil.

Being good soil, is your job, too.
Every day, everywhere we turn,
The Lord sends us opportunities to do His work.

Each opportunity is a seed.
We need to be good soil, so the seed can grow.

Will we see? Will we hear? Will our hearts be open?

Will the seeds grow and prosper?
They will, with God's help.

In our Baptismal Covenant we are asked:

“Will you proclaim ... the Good News...?”

“Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons ...?”

“Will you strive for justice and peace ...?”

We answer each question, in the same way:

“I will, with God's help.”

With God's help, the seeds that God has planted in our hearts
will flower and the people of God will grow.

With God's help, we shall be one people.
Our eyes shall be opened, and our ears shall hear,
and the Kingdom shall prosper,
right here, in Killeen, Texas.

With God's help. Let's go to work!
-AMEN

ⁱ Many Christians proclaim the Bible as “God’s Word”. And it is. But knowing that that doesn’t answer all the questions.

ⁱⁱ Does Creation Science make sense? Only with God, but then what about the fossil record?

ⁱⁱⁱ It is related to the Greek verb ἀποκρύπτειν (apokryptein), which means "to hide away".

^{iv} The Apocryphal books are interesting. The word apocrypha is Greek influenced Medieval Latin. In ancient Greek, ἀπόκρυφος (apokryphos) meant to "obscure" or “hide” something. In Medieval Latin the word “apocryphus” conveyed a sense of secretness, of something intentionally hidden.

^v Until sometime after 300 CE the received scriptures included only the Septuagint; there were many other older writings of interest. Notably, the Old Testament concludes circa 430 BCE, whereas it is suggested that the New Testament begins circa 4 CE. The various apocryphal books arose in the 400 year lapse. As some authors have noted, the Bible is not intended to be a comprehensive statement of political or cultural history of either the ancient Jews or of early Christianity. For example, the Bible doesn’t mention the Maccabean Revolt (so, there is not Biblical basis for Jewish Hanukkah). The Bible doesn’t mention Alexander the Great (356 – 323 BCE) although his military successes were the spark that led to the Hellenization of the Western World. The Bible and especially the OT, says very little about who we call Satan, demons, or

hell, because all of those ideas were still barely formed. What the Bible says about them seems influenced by the Greek culture in which the ancient Hebrew scriptures were written.

^{vv} As the Christian church become more organized, theologians and church leaders began to discuss the issue. Many church Councils or Synods were called to review the circumstances and attempt to resolve the issue. Reportedly, Jerome thought that Apocrypha's seven books were not canonical, while Augustine thought they were. The discussion continues to this date, the Protestants rejecting the Apocrypha, and the Romans more or less, accepting it.

^{vi} The American branch of the Church of England.

^{vii} Usually we would use "catholic" – small "c".

^{viii} Frequently referred to as The Hebrew Bible, which I think is inaccurate, since the ancients necessarily did not have the notions about the "Bible" that contemporary Christians do. It is unwise, but all too common, to import onto the ancients our modern notions, which they could not have possessed.

^{ix} "Who Knows What Lurks In the Hearts of Men (and Women)?" All I know is that we don't always get the whole thing.

^x In some Gospels a title is added to that missing part, for the reader's convenience: "The Purpose of the Parables".

^{xi} Many preachers will read the Gospel and conclude that Jesus got into a boat with his disciples. That makes sense but that is not what the Bible actually says. It doesn't tell us how he got the boat or if he was with anyone, then. He was with his disciples however, at some later time.

^{xii} Or maybe he stopped because the people had heard it all before, so they went home and back to work. The Bible doesn't say, and we don't know what happened.

^{xiii} Called "disciples".

^{xiv} In response to the question, Jesus said a lot of strange sounding stuff.

^{xv} *Parable* comes to us via Anglo-French from the Late Latin word *parabola*, which in turn comes from Greek *parabolē*, meaning "comparison." <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/parable>

^{xvi} "But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear." Matt. 13:16, cf, "I told them a parables to try to keep it simple. I hope they will eventually figure it out."

^{xvii} On this occasion in Mathew's Gospel, Jesus is saying that his disciples did understand but on other occasions he was more frustrated with them NOT understanding. Jesus was not easy to understand then and he isn't now. Even his Mom ah trouble sorting Jesus' out. See, Mark 6:52, 8:14-21, Matt. 16:12, John 6:32-68, Luke 2:47-51.

^{xviii} Whenever I feel really confident that I have Jesus figured out, I know that I need to double check: “Am I right Lord? Do I really understand?” Sometimes I am brave enough to ask myself: “Do you really want to understand”?

^{xix} When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path.... ²³ But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields....” Matt. 13:19, 23