

Sermon: *What Kind of Soil are You?*
Text: *Matthew 13:1 – 9*
Date: *July 13, 2008 AM*
Place: *Jesup FUMC*

You know, I have to be honest with you right up front this morning. I don't know the first thing about farming. I grew up watching my grandparents farm. Grandma milked the cows twice a day, fed the chickens, and kept the house. Grandpa cleaned the milk barn, took care of the pigs, and worked in the fields. But when it comes to farming, I'm kinda like the boy who was digging potatoes with his grandpa one day. And after about an hour, the boy looked up at his grandpa with sweat rolling down his face and said: "*Papa, why did you bury these things in here anyway?*"

But you can't miss the point of Jesus' story this morning. Jesus said: there once was a sower who went out to sow. And some seed fell on the path; some fell on rocky ground; some fell on thorny ground; and some fell on good ground. Now, the sower is Jesus; the seed is the Gospel; and the soil is you and me. And the whole point of Jesus' story is: What kind of soil are you? How do you receive and respond to the Word of God?

Are you the hard soil? Jesus said: "*When anyone hears the message about the Kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.*"

Now, when we read this story, we naturally think about some mean ole person who just won't listen to the Word of God. But it could be any of us. Anybody

can become hard-hearted. Sometimes, it's because of the difficult things that have happened to them along the way; sometimes, it's because of their environment, the things they see happening around them; and sometimes, it's because of disobedience and sin, but whatever the case, the seed of the Gospel cannot penetrate hard hearts.

I remember the excitement I had when I started out in the ministry. I thought I was going to do great things for the Kingdom. I really thought I was going to preach the truth and people were going to respond. And when it didn't happen, I began to wonder, "*What's the use?*" I really thought the church could be different from the world, and when it wasn't, I began to wonder: "*What's the use?*" I really thought I'd be able to feed the hungry and help the needy, but more and more, all I see is people trying to scam one church after another and it's easy to wonder: "*What's the use?*"

And slowly but surely I built a barrier around my heart, a barrier of protection, a barrier of insulation, a heart-hardening barrier that the Word of God cannot penetrate. Now, I know I'm alone; I know nobody else feels that way, but ...

What kind of soil are you? Is your heart a little hard this morning? Then, what are you doing about it?

Are you rocky soil? Jesus said: **"The one who received the seed that fell on the rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts for only a short time. When**

trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, he quickly falls away."

Rocky soil is shallow and so is the faith of those in this category. You see, they receive the Word and they get all excited about it, but they never grow. They want all the joys and privileges of the Kingdom without having to pay the price.

A few years ago, a young man applied to seminary. He was recommended by his church, his pastor, and his District Superintendent. But something was wrong with his application. There was no college transcript. And when the seminary contacted the college for a transcript, they discovered the young man had never graduated from college. Oh, he audited a few classes, but he wasn't willing to pay the price and do the hard work of earning a degree.

That's what the rocky ground is all about. Some truly believe they can audit the Christian life. They want to belong to the church; they want to be seen as a moral person, but they won't pay the price or make the sacrifices necessary to grow in the faith. Their soil is shallow and when the enthusiasm is gone, so are they. They join the church and start out good and then, in a few years, you can't find them. Or they join the church and then, just sit on a pew. They fail to keep their promises to be faithful to God and His church through their prayers, presence, gifts and service.

So what kind of soil are you? Is your commitment a little shallow? Then, what are you doing about it?

Are you thorny soil? Jesus said: *“The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the one who hears the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.”*

Now, thorny soil is good soil. It's deep enough, soft enough, and rich enough, but it's too crowded. Many things are growing in the thorny soil and the other things tend to choke out the seed. This is the picture of a distracted heart. In fact, Jesus even tells us what the distractions are.

First, they are distracted by the worries of life. You and I understand the worries of life. We are sometimes distracted by sickness, by suffering and pain, or by the death of a loved one. But we can also be distracted by good things, even family things. We've become so busy that we're too busy for God. The weeds and the briars of our busyness are choking the Kingdom of God out of our lives. We've got time to do anything and everything as long as it doesn't relate to the church and our spiritual needs. Maybe it's time to do some weeding in the garden.

Second, they are distracted by the deceitfulness of wealth. Sometimes it's hard to tell who our God is, because we worship our money; we adore it; we long for it; and the way we spend it reveals a lot. We're so wealthy that we don't want for anything, not even God.

There once was a rich man who lived a miserable life. So, he went to see the pastor, asking the cause of his misery. And the pastor took him to the window and said: "*Look out there! What do you see?*" The man said: "*I see men, women, and children.*" So the pastor took him to a mirror and said: "*Now, what do you see?*" And the man said: "*I see myself.*" The pastor said: "*My child, in the mirror there is a glass and in the window there is a glass. But in the mirror the glass is covered with a little silver, and no sooner is the silver added than you cease to see others and begin seeing yourself instead.*" Maybe it's time to do some weeding in the garden.

What kind of soil are you? Is your heart a little distracted today? Then, what are you doing about it?

Are you good soil? Jesus said: "**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 when was sown.**"

You know, some soil has been well prepared, through ploughing and fertilizing, and it's just ready for planting time. And so, some people are just ready when God's Word is proclaimed to hear it and to apply it to their lives. Some people are just crazy enough to believe that God means what He says in His Word. And when they hear it and respond to it, then it takes root in their lives and produces an abundance of lasting spiritual fruit.

What kind of soil are you? Is your heart ready and receptive to the Word of God? What are you doing to keep it that way?

You see, there is hard soil; there is rocky soil; there is thorny soil; and there is good soil. In fact, if the truth were to be told this morning, there are times in our lives where we've been in each of these categories. We've been resistant and we've been receptive; we've been distracted and we've been defeated! But the good news is: wherever you are along the spectrum, you and God can change it all. God can use the Holy Spirit to plough up the hard soil; He can use the Holy Spirit to dig deeper so that the seed can take root and produce fruit; God can use the Holy Spirit to weed out the distractions that are choking out the seed so that it can take root and produce fruit; and God can use the Holy Spirit to continue to produce His fruit in your heart and life. You are the deciding factor. And all you have to do is surrender, surrender your heart and life to Jesus Christ; renew your commitment to Him this morning and allow Him to work in you and through you today.

Some years ago, a little girl was traveling across Kansas with her grandparents. And they were enjoying the beautiful scenery along the way, especially the corn fields. And suddenly a storm blew up and the wind started blowing through the corn. And the grandmother said: "*Looks like the wind is going to blow the corn down.*" And the little girl said: "*Oh no, grandma, the corn is planted deep. And you don't blow down when you're planted deep.*"

How deep is God's Word planted in the soil of your life?