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“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

MATTHEW 13

¹That same day Jesus left the house and was sitting by the sea. ²A large crowd gathered around him. So he stepped into a boat and sat down, while all the people stood on the shore. ³He told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen, a sower went out to sow. ⁴As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it. ⁵Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil. Immediately the seed sprang up, because the soil was not deep. ⁶But when the sun rose, the seed was scorched. Because it had no root, it withered away. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and choked it. ⁸But some seed fell on good ground and produced grain: some one hundred times, some sixty, and some thirty times more than was sown. ⁹Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.

¹⁸“So listen carefully to 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 has been sown in his heart. This is the seed that was sown along the path. ²⁰The seed that was sown on rocky ground is the person who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹yet he is not deeply rooted and does not endure. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away. ²²The seed that was sown among the thorns is the one who hears the word, but the worry of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it produces no fruit. ²³But the seed that was sown on the good ground is the one who continues to hear and understand the word. Indeed he continues to produce fruit: some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times more than was sown.”



Today we receive the Word with joy. Not only do we receive the Word with joy, but we receive a beloved sister, Cassandra Schilling, into public ministry at this place with joy. To God alone be the glory.

Whom should we ask? Whom should we ask about the seed that we scatter or sow? Should we survey and study how people like to hear the Bible? Should we ask the guest or the unchurched? Should we instead ask the spiritual or the wise or the church? Should we ask the preschoolers? Sometimes we have discussions about how people feel about the Bible. We often ask them.

Today we get to hear how the Lord thinks and feels. How does the Lord Jesus regard the seed that we scatter or sow? He tells us some very sure things about this seed. It may be meant as a heart check, but also a comfort and reassurance.

THE LORD KNOWS WHAT THE WORD SOWS

1. The seed works

The world is a field. That's right, Mrs. Schilling, the world is a field just waiting. God gives us this world filled with possibilities. I suppose your particular field looks a little bit more like a classroom of little ones. So many possibilities. So much energy. So much excitement to be had. So much work to be done. But I am convinced there is also so much reward waiting for you in your field.

As it turns out, the field is dirty. (It's made out of dirt.) The sower tosses his seed, and it lands on dirt. Yes, all who get what God is giving them in this parable are dirt. This is a crude thought, but so is death and our sin. There are dirty thoughts we wouldn't even share with our spouse or best friend. There are our dirty actions that are soiled with selfishness. There are our dirty words that we regrettably cannot take back. Even the sweet, angelic little faces to be taught in our preschool wear on their faces and hearts the smudges of sin.

The seed is the Word. So we learn in Luke 8:11, "*The seed is the Word of God.*" The Word is what is scattered to the field, what feeds the world, and what the dirt needs. The seed of the Word tells us that Jesus loves us and died for us. The seed tells us Jesus' blood purifies us from all sin. We were blemished and crimson and in the Word we are clean as the driven snow. This seed speaks to our very heart. It works so well that we do not need to dress it up and make it better. It works so well that we don't need something else instead.

Some would suggest that, in three ways, the seeds of God's Word do not work. It falls on the trodden path, and the devil swoops and snatches it away. This is the bare Word on the hard heart. It seems to have no effect, but truly the devil is concerned about its effect! He needs to remove it before it sinks in. The seed falls on the rocky soil, where it springs up fast and happy, but dies with no room to grow a root. People get excited and want to join our church, but they burn out quickly and soon disappear off the map. The seed falls among thorns, gets choked, and wealth and worries suck them dry. They wither.

Yet none of this means the Word has failed. Is the Word of God to blame when the devil is so concerned about swooping in and snapping it up? Is the Word of God to blame when sinners prefer their shallow past? Is the Word of God to blame when believers look back and worry about the world? You and I can see the results of the seed. It always accomplishes God's purpose.

2. The sower works, too

You may be surprised to learn from our Lord who the sower is, with apron and seed. Is it some great angel? Is it the evangelist Matthew or the great apostle Paul? Is it Jesus Himself? Often in these parables, God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ, have a role. It would make sense for the Son of Man to be the worker here. But Jesus never identifies the sower – not in Matthew, not in Mark, and not in Luke. Therefore, we have to work backwards:

To whom has Jesus entrusted the ministry of the Word? Who throws out the seed? Who spreads the Word? The ministry of the Word has been granted to those whom He has called out of darkness into His wonderful light. It is a ministry entrusted to the Church. The Church declares those praises. Each member has a private expression of faith to share with nearby ears. But the Church in good order extends a divine Call to individuals, those who may carry on the public ministry of the gospel. Paul "*planted the seed, Apollos watered it,*" you might say Peter fertilized it, "*but God makes it grow*" (1 Cor. 3:6).

Pastors, yes are, the most comprehensive form of public ministry in the visible church. The way I see it, at Bethlehem, the preschool teacher is not far behind. Here at Bethlehem, perhaps no other arm of ministry gets to share the Word as often to as many as our preschool. It will be Mrs. Schilling sowing the seed, throwing it to the field, spreading the Word, weaving it into each lesson.

You are called to sow a great deal of seed. You are called to carry out this task diligently, responsibly, faithfully. But you have an advantage; you know this seed well. This is the very same seed that was sowed into your heart. It has produced such a full crop already: 30-, 60-, 100-fold. Thirty times since you have been rooted and established in the faith, as you were taught, overflowing with thankfulness; 60 times since you poured your heart into studies of the Scriptures and teaching methods and practiced with real students; can it be 100 times the crop in your future here at Bethlehem? May the fruits of your labors be 30 times, 60 times, 100 times the Word that was sown into your heart.

May I reassure you of something? The Lord who calls people into service also equips them for that same service. The Lord Jesus gives you the seed to sow. Furthermore, the Lord promises results for a faithful sowing of the Word. Little hearts that believe. Little hearts that find joy. Little hearts that take root. Little hearts that trust God beyond the cares of this world.

These are the fruits of the sower who will just cast God's Word. Just put it out there. Just speak it matter-of-fact. Just be plain and straightforward with it.

Learn for your own peace of mind what this Word will bring the sower personally. Not only will your labors produce fruits out there, in the hearts of little children; but your labors will produce fruits in here, in your heart: thankfulness, joy, fun, dedication, earnestness, hope, and courage.

Members of Bethlehem, love our new sower. Honor her and cooperate with her. Go to God for her and intercede on her behalf. She will need our support. It is incumbent on us to have her back. It is also a glorious privilege to see the sower send the seed. We all need to get to work, finding ways and opportunities to coax families to a deeper root in the Word.

But in our work, let us remember who makes the seed grow. It is not the field, it is not the dirt, it is arguably not even the sower. It is God. Paul "*planted the seed, Apollos watered it,*" Peter fertilized it, "*but God makes it grow*" (1 Cor. 3:6). There's a promise never to forget. It is not your law, but God's law. It is not your forgiveness, but God's forgiveness. It is not your class, but God's class. It is not your ministry, but God's ministry. It is not your heaven, but God's heaven. But praise God for the truth that He speaks through you; because you get to sow it, scatter it, say it.

Mrs. Schilling, welcome to the field!

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.