

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 12, 2020, Year A

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

***"Sowing Seeds"***

It is hard to believe that it is 6 years ago that we visited St. Andrew's for the first time, shortly after Marilyn and I returned from leading our trip to Israel. It was on Sunday, July 27<sup>th</sup>, that I stood at the Lectern in this church for the very first time, having been invited by the 'search committee' to see if I might be your next rector. I was a guest preacher and the message and the Gospel are the same as that year on the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost. Six wonderful years can provide us growth and insight – a deeper knowledge of God's plan for all of our lives and it can also open our eyes to a painful truth that comes along with that Gospel.

In this Holy Gospel reading, Jesus sat in the boat and spoke to all those who gathered to hear Him speak – and He told them the Parable of the Soils – or as it is sometimes called the Parable of the Sower. Jesus reminds us that the Kingdom of God is an open invitation to anyone who is willing to receive it – whose heart has been prepared by the Holy Spirit, and is ready to repent and accept Jesus as the Lord of their life. It is our job, as followers of Jesus Christ to be sowing the seed of the one true Gospel - which is the saving grace of God through true repentance and forgiveness of our sins – and the power of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross.

Time and time again, we have talked about the fact that there are some people who never accept Jesus' invitation, or even worse still - only partially accept it – plugging in their own truths, or whatever the current society dictates, instead of Jesus' Truth. Just as the seed falls on different soils – so will His Gospel. Some of that seed will take root and flourish – while some will wither and die. There is a path that leads down from the Mount of Beatitudes to a place called Tabgha, where the feeding of the 5,000 took place, and it also the place where the risen Jesus cooked breakfast in John Chapter 21 for the Apostles. As you walk along that path, there are these volcanic rocks and you see the different kinds of soils. The path, where something is going to grow for just a bit, the rocky soil, and then you see the good soil. It is amazing – it comes to life as you read the Scripture – seeing where the Gospels happen. Some of that seed is going to grasp and take root, some will wither and die, and just like those who fail to fully see the truth and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord – that Jesus is God – and that we are all sinners in dire need of a Savior – and that Savior is Jesus of Nazareth. The reality is that not everyone will be saved – and that hurts. This is not an easy thing to hear – and it can of course be horrifying to think that there are some who will not spend eternity with Jesus – and knowing that there is nothing, absolutely nothing that we can do to change that situation.

It is like in baseball. To be a million-dollar player – you have to fail seven times out of ten – to be a three hundred hitter! Boy is that payday! If you go into baseball, in a situation knowing that you will fail seven out of ten times, or a pitcher is not going to get everyone out – you know there are 27 outs in a game and it is hard. Are there any baseball fans here? We are all happy that there will be some baseball happening. We need to realize that just like this .300 hitter is going to fail seven out of ten times – we do not have the power to bring a fallen soul to Christ – but we should still take the opportunity to tell them. To tell them the truth. The easiest way to

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do this is to tell them what Jesus has done in our life. How He has shown us the truth and the love that only He can give. Once we have planted that seed, realize that like that .300 hitter that is going to fail seven times out of ten, we need to know that there is nothing that we can do to save their soul. Once we have given them the truth – we pray for the Holy Spirit to take root in their hearts, to crack open that kernel of truth – to help it grow. Besides the seed, we are called to nourish and help people to grow through witness, good example, and through patience and love. That is where we come in. There will be times, because none of us are perfect, but we need to leave it to God – because we do not have the power to take care of that.

We are blessed to live in a part of the country that is remarkably familiar with seeds; what a seed does; and also how far you can go to help that seed. When you plant that seed - when you plant that crop – you do not have the power to make it grow! When you tell someone about Jesus Christ – when you introduce them to the Gospel – you do not make them come to Christ. You introduce them to the truth and then you pray for the Holy Spirit to miraculously work in their lives. We can come alongside them as the best Christian you can be - to help nourish them – but you do not crack open that seed. The Holy Spirit does the impossible, the miraculous – and that is why we have to trust in the Holy Spirit – that the invitation that has been given will be opened and be a part of their life for evermore.

Unfortunately, there are some people who think that by simply praying a prayer you will get to heaven. Of course it is an important and powerful step toward knowing Jesus, but that is only a part of the nourishment of that seed that is planted and which is broken open by the Holy Spirit to sprout and take life. Just praying a prayer alone would be like the seed falling on one of the four soils. Think about those soils: the path, the rocky ground, the thorns, and the good soil. The environment, the life of the very heart of the believer, is the soil in which the seed falls.

Just praying a prayer alone – would be like the seed falling upon the rocky soil and unless there is a change of heart and behavior, with a willingness to submit to Jesus as Lord. That my friends is called faith. But, if you are the same person, doing the same old things, the same old behavior that you did before you met Jesus – then there has been no growth – no transformation – and no root. I asked you this question just a couple of weeks ago – “who are you when no one is looking?” Are you the same person that you are at church on Sunday, or are you different when you are with your friends? I want you to listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21 *“Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”* We must give Jesus the permission to change us – to transform us – and to make us grow to be more like Him. That is not just called permission – but submission to His Lordship. So let me ask you – are you are the same person, doing the same old things that you did before you met Jesus? I really pray that you are not!

Spreading the Word of God is a charge that each and every believer was given when the risen Jesus stood on a mountain in the Galilee and said, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all*

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*nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”* (Matthew 28:19-20) This Great Commissioning helps not only to spread the seed – but to help prepare the soil, and to nurture the growth that God has enabled. The work of the people of God, the Body of Christ, is to help water and feed those whom He has called and chosen to be His; those with “ears to hear” His message – to hear and understand the Holy Word of God. Our response as members of His holy church, who were onetime seedlings ourselves, is to bear the fruit of His love in mission to others.

In today’s Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 55:1-13, God reminds us that He expects to see the effects of His works: *“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”* (Isaiah 55:10-11) God’s investment in you – in all of us – is the most costly of all – that of His Son, Jesus Christ. His expectation of us is costly as well – He expects us to give our all – our everything to Him – by not just calling Him Lord, but by treating Him as Lord. None of us are perfect, but Jesus has given us the grace by which we can come to Him, seeking His forgiveness when we fall, and seeking His guidance – to change our behavior and grow in Him.

Once the seed is sown – the Body of Christ has got to assist in the growth of the seedling; and that my friends - is where all of us come in. And it is not just for the growth of others – but for our own growth as well. Coming to church on Sunday, or watching church on a video as we have had to do during this COVID time, is a wonderful thing – but it does not or should not end there. Coming to church on Sunday does not make you a Christian. We are called to be in relationship with one another – spending time in God’s Word, sharing and praying with one another. Six years ago on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July I got my first taste of passing the peace at Saint Andrew’s. It is a little different now due to the COVID and the masks, but once we are freed to be able to engage with one another as I saw and I was in awe – and I still am. It is so awfully hard for this parish family - who loves one another so deeply – to have to reign it in during this pandemic and simply wave to each other. We are a parish family! We gather together in fellowship and an opportunity to let the light of Christ shine in one another and to others around us - using the blessings that the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon you for His glory, and for His Kingdom. It ain’t about us – it is about Him.

Everything that we think, do, and say as the ‘Body of Christ’ has to do with ‘the Good News’ - the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are blessed to be in good soil – and we must help to nurture those seeds who pop up along the way, by the grace of God, and to help them flourish and grow in Him, to bear fruit themselves. And so I want to encourage you – keep spreading the News!

We are each called to speak to others about the blessing of Christ’s Church community in which God has planted you. You did not happen here by accident – we did not happen here by accident - you came to this place because God called you, I came to this place because God

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called me and Marilyn. As I have said many times before – it could be on the ‘socially distanced line’ at Harvey’s or Walmart – and it quite often is not what you say – but how you say and carry yourself. We can help to guide others toward Jesus Christ – who is “*the Way, the Truth and the Life.*” (John 14:6) He indeed is the narrow gate. Jesus told us in the Gospel of Matthew 7:13-14 - all a part of the Sermon on the Mount - “*Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*” Keep spreading the News and let us watch the seeds grow - together!