

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 16, 2017, Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

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

"Watch the Seeds Grow"

Time flies! It was three years ago that Marilyn and I led a group of 19 to Israel. We were over there three years ago – and we were seeing some incredible things happen – even without our luggage! Nineteen people go to the counter in Buffalo – Marilyn and I in front, since we were leading the trip. Our luggage goes in first, all the other people's luggage makes it to Tel Aviv – but ours was still in Buffalo. My vestments were in my checked bag, but I was smart enough to pack my stole in my carry-on bag as I was marrying a couple on the shore of the Sea of Galilee on Saturday Night. Since we landed on a Friday and in about an hour or so it would be Shabbat (Sabbath) and that meant that our bags would not get to us until sometime late Sunday. God is good! One of the people on the trip, the father of the bride, had a white polo that he gave me, and some undergarments; we just happened to be about the same size! God made it happen – we had a beautiful wedding and suddenly late Sunday our bags were there. God does not let things stand in the way. Here is something that might be a surprise to some of you, soon after we got back from that trip – it was on Sunday, July 27th, that I stood in this pulpit for the very first time as a guest. Fr. James was in the chair and I was a guest preacher – a prospective candidate for Rector of St. Andrew's. How ironic it is that today is the very same Gospel that I preached about that day. I was blessed. The message and the Gospel have not changed. Three wonderful years can provide 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.

Jesus sat in the boat and spoke to those who gathered to hear Him speak – and He told them the Parable of the Soils – which is also known as the Parable of the Sower. This remarkable parable 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 Lord of their life. We as followers of Jesus Christ have the task of sowing the seed of the one true Gospel of Jesus Christ which is the saving grace of God through true repentance and forgiveness of our sins – through Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross.

We have often shared that it is so sad that some people never accept Jesus' invitation, or even worse still - only partially accept it –by plugging in their own truths instead of His. 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. It is the same with those who fail to fully see the truth and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord – that Jesus is God – and that we are sinners in need of a savior – and that Savior is Him. That my dear friends, is the cold hard reality of it – that not everyone will be saved – many through their own unwillingness to see the truth or to accept the truth. This is not a fun thing or 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 even worse still – knowing that there is nothing, absolutely nothing that we can do to change that. While it is true that there is not one person here today who can save a soul – it is also true that each one of us is called to tell them the truth anyway! We have got to keep spreading the news! We are not supposed to fold up our tents and go home because we have no control over who goes to

heaven or not – NO, instead we are to try even harder to sow the seed of truth – and to pray for the Holy Spirit to take root in their hearts. Giving up should not be a part of our vocabulary – and besides sowing the seed – we are called to nourish and help it to grow through witness, good example, and through patience and love. That's where the church as the Body of Christ comes in.

There are people in this congregation that are very familiar with seeds – and what seed does; and also how far you can go with that seed. When you plant that seed, when you plant that crop – you can't make it grow! We saw last year the lack of water – it took the corn crop 'down south!' Did the farmers cause that? No! Farmers did everything they could - they watered it; just like when you tell someone about Jesus Christ – when introduce them to the Gospel – do you make them come to Christ – the answer to that is - no. You introduce it and then you pray for the Holy Spirit. Now you, through love and friendship – being the best Christian you can be as an example – can most certainly help – but you do not crack open that seed. The Holy Spirit does that – 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 live for evermore.

Sadly there are some people who think that simply praying a prayer will get you to heaven or maybe answering an altar call at a concert will open the door to eternal life. These are indeed important and powerful steps toward knowing Jesus but they are all merely a part of that seed that is planted and which is broken open by the Holy Spirit to sprout and take life. Let me give you an example – in the year 2000 Marilyn, I and the kids sat in the stadium every night during the Billy Graham Crusade in Jacksonville, Fl. Marilyn and I were Counselors, and when the invitation started, and we knew that because the band started to play "Just As I Am," people would start to come down from the stands onto the infield. Anyone who was wearing a white name tag was a Counselor – and we were to stand by people when they wanted to make a decision to come to Christ – and we were to pray with them and share the Gospel with them. It didn't stop there – we had them fill out some information – and that information was turned in to a 'follow up' committee. I had to call the people the next day to see if they were ok and if they had any other questions. They were then connected with a church in the community who did the 'water and fertilizing' if you will, of the seed that had been planted. 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 – will be like the seed falling upon the rocky soil – unless there is a change of heart with repentance and a willingness to submit to Jesus as Lord, trusting in Him for all things. That 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 – no root. I asked this question 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 at a coffee hours; or at a get together? 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.”* A response is required – not just saying “YES Lord – I want to know you” but more than that is required. We have to give Jesus the permission to change us – to transform us – 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 pray that you are not!

Spreading the Word of God is a charge that each and every believer was given when Jesus said *“Go therefore and make disciples of all 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, to nurture the growth that God has enabled. The work of the people of God, His Holy Church, 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 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 55:10-11 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.”* 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.

Once the seed is sown – the Body of Christ must 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. One of the parishioners of this parish told me that before we met that they didn’t read the Bible, but after discussions, and lessons, and sermons, and teachings – that person is in the Bible all of the time now – and not just to open it and see where it falls and say that is what God has to say to me today – but it is being in His Word – being fed, being nourished. God bless that person! Coming to church on Sunday is a wonderful thing – but it doesn’t or shouldn’t end there. Coming to church on Sunday does not make you a Christian just like going to McDonalds does make you a hamburger. (Do you remember that was in last week sermon?) We are called to be in relationship with one another – spending time in God’s Word, sharing and praying with one another. Three years ago on the 27th of July I got my first taste of passing the peace at Saint Andrew’s – and I was in awe – and I still am. It is very hard (before the bell rings by the organist) to see everybody – working my way through the

congregation – but I am not going to stop trying! That is what family is about – we gather together in fellowship and an opportunity to let the light of Christ shine in one another and to others around us – not just for the clergy ministering to you – but it is about you ministering to one another – using the blessings that the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon you for His glory, for His Kingdom. Everything that we think do and say as the ‘Body of Christ’ has to do with ‘the Good News’ - the Gospel of Jesus Christ; listening to a person who needs to share, a word of encouragement, a prayer – that is spreading the Good News that Christ has given to you. I cannot tell you how often people come into my office and close the door – and all of a sudden an hour and a half has gone by – and I all I am doing is listening – and I may share a thought, a Word, a prayer – but that person is different when they leave because they have had a chance to be heard, to tell what is going on in their lives. 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! That is letting Christ’s light shine.

We are each called to speak to others about the blessing of Christ’s Church community in which God has planted you. You didn’t happen here by accident – you came to this place because God called you, I came to this place because God called me,. As I have said many times before – it could be on line at Harvey’s or Walmart, at Brook’s Auto Parts, in Lowes or even at Rockin’ 8 Cinemas. It quite often is not what you say – but how you say and carry yourself. Along the way, we can help to guide others toward Jesus Christ – the Way, the Truth and the Life. 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 watch the seeds grow!