

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

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 4:1-11

***“Sow What?”***

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 Christ 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 for us on the Cross.

Well, the seed that we are called to sow is the Word of God, – specifically the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The sowing is us using our God-given gifts and talents, and sharing the Good News of our own relationship with Jesus Christ – and what He has done in our lives.

Let's take a closer look at some of that insight...

*“A farmer went out to sow his seed”.*

Now - I grew up on Long Island so I didn't know or see many farmers. Moving here to Douglas I have seen them, I see their machinery, (sometimes I have followed them on the roadways) their silos – and I am learning and respecting a great deal about farmers. All that land - and all that hard work – all of it theirs to till!

One thing I have learned is the **farmers know something about “making a living.”**

- They know what it means to work.
- Farmers live with a strong work ethic; an attitude – if they don't do it - it won't get done.
- (Did you hear about the farmer that told his son - who was always complaining about work that he only had to work half days --- and he didn't care which 12 hours he chose!)
- Farmers know that if they don't put it in the ground ---then it will never spring up out of the ground. You don't plow a field in your mind, you need to get out and do it!

I can vividly remember walking with my family from the Mount of Beatitudes down to the shore of the Sea of Galilee, at the Church of Peter's Primacy (also the place where Jesus fed the 5,000). The path was winding, and all along the side of the path were grey rocks – pretty good size, just seeming to be everywhere. The ground was hard – this was ground that the people of Jesus time were very familiar with – and it instantly brought me to this parable.

This experience transported me right into the Scripture and I can still visualize the farmer scattering his seed and seeing some of it fall on the path, and by the wayside, and some off of the path.

Jesus was referring to folks who did not get it, who heard the message but failed to comprehend it.... they did not understand... they didn't “take it to heart” and therefore it did not feed them. So the birds came and ate it up. The birds represent Satan and the evil influence that he has in the world. Satan is the thief --- and like the birds that take the seed away, he robs us of God's truth --- if we refuse to believe.

Jesus said the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. The truth is – there is good soil. The seeds that we have must find their way to the good soil. The path – or the soil is the object of our evangelistic efforts. Our use of our gifts must be intentional... aimed towards people looking for answers. That doesn't mean you have to stand on a street corner with a rollie Bible – saying 'the end is near – repent!' Sometimes, as I have said many times before – it is just a shoulder for someone who is lost or hurting, or it might be someone who is trying to deal with his or her kids on the line at Walmart or on the line at Harvey's – and you might just be able to give them a smile - a loving smile not a condescending smile.

It is distressing that some never accept that invitation, or even worse still - only partially accept that invitation. Some outwardly reject it thinking that they are the highest thing on this planet and that nobody is bigger than they are – not even God! Some people will say 'oh yeah – I know the Lord' but they don't live like it – and plug 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 Christ came into the world and that He is Lord – that Jesus is God – and that we are all sinners in need of a savior, and that Savior is Him. That my friends, is the cold hard reality of it that not everyone will be saved; that hurts to know that, but there are people who outwardly reject the Gospel – that outwardly reject Jesus. Not everyone will be saved - many through their own unwillingness to see the truth or to accept the truth. I know this is not a fun 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 about it. While it is true that there is not one person here today that can save a soul – it is also true that each one of us is called to tell them the truth anyway, and show them the truth! **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.

Sadly there are some people who think that simply praying a prayer will get you into heaven – or maybe answering an altar call at a large event 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. What follows is most the important in the life – *the eternal life* of any believer. Think of the 4 soils: the path, the rocky ground, the thorns, and the good soil. The environment, the life – the very heart of the believer - is the soil upon which its seed falls. Just praying a prayer alone – will be like the seed falling upon the rocky soil – unless there is repentance and a willingness to submit to Jesus as Lord, trusting in Him for all things. That is called faith!

First Sunday in Lent – March 5, 2017, Year A

If you are the same person, doing the same old things, the same behavior that you did before you met Jesus – then there has been no growth – no transformation – and as Jesus said - no root! Jesus said in Matthew 7:21 – also a part of the Sermon on the Mount - *“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 – the invitation is there for everyone. How many of us have heard time after time *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16) There’s the invitation! The key word is ‘believe’ - not just knows Him, but believes. That is where the response is required – not just saying “YES Lord – I want to know you” but there is more than that required. We have to give Jesus the permission in our lives to change us – to transform us. Last week we talked about an amazing transformation – the Transfiguration – when Jesus showed Peter James and John on that mountain what He really looked like – as God. We have to give Him permission, and not just 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 on a mountain in the Galilee, as recorded in Matthew 28 *“Therefore go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:19-20) You have heard me say that this is not just the Great Commission but it is the Great Co-mission; that we are in it together. Jesus is in it with us. It 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 His holy church; as onetime seedlings ourselves, is to bear the fruit of His love in mission to others.

I want to share with you an important Scripture from Isaiah 55:10-11 in which 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 has made an investment in you – in all of us – and it is the most costly thing – it cost Him 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.

Let me ask you a question – those of you with children or grandchildren, or nieces or nephews; do you expect when they say that they love you - that they TRULY love you with all of their heart? Or are they just giving you “that much”? (a tiny bit) What do you want from them in return? You give them all of your love - you expect them to love you the same degree, and most

of them do. Think of that from God's perspective – that as our parent – Our Father – loves us more than we can even imagine – and yet do we return to Him that love – or do we just give Him “that much.” (a tiny bit)

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 we all come in. And it is not just for the growth of others – but for our own growth as well. Coming to church on Sunday is a wonderful thing – but it doesn't or shouldn't end there. We are called to be in relationship with one another – spending time in God's Word, sharing and praying with one another. Wednesday Nights we have a fabulous time of fellowship as we eat dinner together at 5:30, after which we have Christian Education for all ages – 5 different classes. Farmers – you know that you just can't plant the seed and walk away – and I am looking around the room at a lot of people that have experience – of planting seeds or enabling others to plant seeds. You can't just put it in the ground and leave it there. What are these huge things when you drive down 158 towards Waycross; you see these long tubes on wheels – doesn't that water so that it can nourish? You can't just leave it alone – you have to help it; no one can break open a seed and make it grow. We can prepare it, we can nourish it, we can feed it – R.W. Griffin knows all about that, helping people to nourish the seeds that they put in the ground. Not one of us can save a soul but we can share about Jesus with them, just like fertilizer and water – we can help it – but only the Holy Spirit can crack open that kernel and make it grow. It needs a lot of loving care – and some work too – maybe even some prayer. You see what I am getting at here?

As we care for one another, pray for one another, and even teach one another – we are caring for God's fields – and helping to make each other grow. For that I am extremely grateful to see the work that is going on in this parish, and the care and prayer for one another.