

Sixth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/A) “**Tending the Soil of My Inner Garden**”

Isaiah 55:10-13; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

July 11-12, 2020

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

I am an amateur gardener. I am fascinated by gardening and soils. My gardens focus on flowers, not vegetables. And they are in full bloom this year. I am happy.

We might ask, “What makes a soil what it is and how can it produce fruit or flowers?” We know that here on the Jersey shore most home soil is sandy, with perhaps a layer of clay and rocks a foot under the surface. That means my garden needs lots of watering. (Hooray for the storm!) And when the flowers don’t bloom, I need to figure out why. (My Larkspur just died.)

According to Matthew, Jesus has just experienced a string of rejections. Read chapter 12. So he begins this chapter of parables about God’s Kingdom trying to explain to his disciples what is happening. He speaks of four soils and says,
Some people hear my message and it is like it lands on a hard path and never gets a chance to germinate. It is gobbled up and never takes root.
Some people hear my message but don’t really give it a chance. They forget it before they even get home.
Some people hear my message but daily life chokes it. Making ends meet and getting ahead is more important than what I am telling them.
Some people hear my message and get it, they really understand. And more blessings occur than they could ever imagine.

The disciples nod in agreement, and completely miss the point Jesus was making.

You see, immediately there is a danger, what I call the **window** and the **mirror**. When we hear or read the Bible as a **window**, we use it to aid us in looking out the window of our lives to observe other people. I see them and say, ‘That person fits this or that soil.’ Jesus is explaining *them to me*.

But when we hear or read the Bible as a **mirror**, I see myself. Jesus is explaining *me to me*. In this case, which soil am I?? So let me use this story as a mirror and ask, what does it tell me about me?

When do I so ignore the Word that I don’t even know when it is gone, snatched away by some malevolent power? (Mind you, that power need not be solely the Devil.) How often have I walked out of here (or shut down the zoom or Facebook service) and I can’t even remember the Gospel lesson? Hmm. Am I really just a hard road?

When does the Word excite me but the excitement doesn’t last very long? My memory span is diminishing, but that is no excuse. Jesus suggests that there can be a shallowness in my life that stunts the growth of his Gospel. Ouch!

When does the world take control and squeeze out the Word from my life? Like everyone, I guess, I have bills to pay. The baseball season might actually resume, and night games will interfere with church

meetings on zoom. Help me, I'm choking!!

And when does grace actually produce a harvest in spite of myself? It does, I know, but I seem to have little control over it.

Let me suggest that these scenarios are not a sequence, but a **recurring pattern** of responses. Just as the Divine Word is constantly being sown into my life, so I am always responding to it, sometimes well and sometimes not so well. And sometimes the sower is an unexpected person or preacher. Life happens that way.

For the second time in my life (the first being the 1960s) I am hearing a Black preacher casting forth the Gospel onto the soils of my life. It is a Gospel addressed to "the poor, the captives and the oppressed," the same folk to whom Jesus spoke in chapter 4 of Luke's Gospel. This Gospel from God confronted me **first** in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., **now** through the Rev. Dr. William Barber in North Carolina and others, and **soon** through our Dialogues On: Race class (we all received an email blast about the course this past week). It is the Gospel of freedom for all folk. And it doesn't treat me as special. It challenges the ways I have supported the denial the Gospel to others, denying them the freedoms that God wishes for all.

How receptive is my soul-soil to this Gospel? Do I hear "Good News" or a distortion of what I believe is the Gospel? Do I hear "Good News" or only a threat to what I believe is right and proper? Onto what kind of soil in my heart is the Word of God falling?

We Lutherans believe that God's Word is always Law and Gospel. God's Word always has a bite to it. And when God's messengers present God's Word in a new way there is always opposition. Recall the Hebrew prophets, Jesus himself, and Martin Luther and the other reformers. And this opposition, suggests Jesus, is **in me**. My soul-soil is not readily receptive. Ouch again!

Paul says in Romans that, "those who live according to the ways of the world [flesh] set their focus [minds] on the things of the world [flesh], but those who live according to the leading of God's Spirit set their focus [minds] on the things of the Spirit." Jesus warns me that the concerns of the world could choke off the life that the Spirit is giving me. Do I really see that in my life (the mirror) or only in the lives of others (through the window)??

Isaiah hears God promise to provide abundant rain. God provides, like the farmer sows the seed. But when do I foil God's plans, or when does God need to go to another field where the soil is better, more responsive? Or is it that I just need more fertilizer?

May these words of Jesus echo in the soil of our souls this coming week.

Amen.

Rev Harold Lay = Pastor Hank