

Many of you know better than I do that farming is hard work. Thus it is so frustrating to the farmer when this work goes to waste. The weather or machinery does not cooperate. There are either floods or not enough rain. It is too cool or too hot. Weeds, bugs or disease damage the crops. But these harsh realities highlight how rewarding farming can be when all goes well. That is when the weather is right, the equipment works, the seeds sprout, the crops grow, the harvest is good, and the prices at the elevator are high. The farmer is able to sell the fruits of his hard work and make some well-deserved money.

While some of us here farm for a living or as a part-time hobby, each one of us, whether we drive a tractor or not, is a farmer of faith by virtue of God’s calling we received in our holy baptism. Our fields of labor are the hearts and lives of those around us. The seed we sow is the Word of God. That Word has been planted into us creating in our lives a harvest of faith to believe in Jesus Christ, God’s Son, as our Savior from sin and our only hope for life now and eternally.

I. God’s Word Is Seed That Grows Faith

A. The Seed Is Sown

We might think that the man in Jesus’ story is a really bad farmer. “Look at all the seed that is going to waste!” But before we are too critical of him, let’s understand his situation. When someone asked to see his planter, he could not point to a big piece of equipment in his shed. Instead, he only could hold up his two hands. He had no global positioning system guiding him, no computer in his tractor telling him how much seed to plant in what type of soil. He planted seeds by throwing them onto the field. Such an operation certainly lacks the precision of our modern machinery.

The hard soil of the field’s foot path would not accept the seed. Birds would eat it before it ever had a chance to grow. Some seed would land in loose soil that barely covered a bed of rocks. It would grow quickly but not be able to take root. Due to a lack of moisture it would wither in the hot sun. Some seed would land where weeds and thorns already were taking root. It is evidence of our rebellious world that the weeds we don’t want grow faster and better than the plants we do want. These wretched weeds choke off good growth like a playground bully scares the little kids away from the swing set.

B. The Seed of God’s Word Is Not Always Received

Jesus sees this frustrating experience of the farmer as being similar to the preaching of His Word. The seed in this story is His message of God’s love and forgiveness for our salvation from sin. Some who hear that word do not want to receive it at all. They feel that they do not need it. To them the good news of Jesus is like water off a duck’s back. Perhaps they think they have no sin for which to be forgiven. They may want to believe that there is no God to whom they are accountable. Or they may

believe that there is a God but that they can stand before Him just fine on their own. This Word of God's love and forgiveness does not penetrate their hearts. Its message quickly is snatched away from their thoughts by the devil who controls their lives.

Others who hear the message of Jesus get very excited very quickly. However, they do not take the time and effort to let His gospel message settle into their hearts by learning more about it. Emotionally charged, they will respond to an altar call on Sunday evening, but then wilt and wither when the rigors of everyday life in this sinful world hit them on Monday morning. When they face the challenge of living the Christian faith in all its fullness their rootless faith is scorched by persecution, ridicule, and their own sinful nature.

Others will receive God's Word in faith and begin to grow spiritually. But soon other things in their lives take priority. The cares of this earthly life become more important to them than their spiritual health. They spend more time checking their Facebook or facing their checkbook than they do in reading God's holy book. They are more concerned with indulging their own personal pleasure than in serving others in their time of need. This selfish focus upon the things of this world soon chokes off what growth of faith God had worked in them.

II. Life-Giving Seed Takes Root in Life-Receiving Soil

A. The Sower Sows

The farmer in Jesus' story knows that much of the seed he sows would be thrown in vain. Yet he flings it in faith. A farmer is what he is, farming is what he does. To be a farmer he has to sow that seed. Likewise, farmers today must realize that much of their work will go to waste. Fields will have to be replanted due to heavy rain and flooding. Bare spots will dot the fields. Heat, disease, and bugs will prevent the plants from producing to their prime potential. Yet the farmers still go out into the fields. Farmers are what they are, farming is what they do. They continue to plant their crops because they realize the tremendous importance of the work they do.

Yet farmers do experience the satisfaction of seeing their labors bear fruit. So, despite the heavy toil of their work, farmers continue to sow seed in the hopes of enjoying a bountiful harvest. It is the same with the Sower of God's Word. Jesus knew that much of what He had to say about God's kingdom would be lost upon this unbelieving world. Jesus knew all along that this world's sinful rejection of His earthly mission would lead to His death upon the cross. But Jesus also knew the tremendous importance of His message of salvation and the great need we have for His perfect life, His death on the cross for our forgiveness, and His resurrection from the dead for our own eternal life.

What Jesus does means life for us. Jesus persisted in sowing the seed of His Word by preaching the good news of our Triune God's love for all of us. We are to be thankful for the persistence of our Savior Sower. Through the seed of God's Word

present for us in the Bible, Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the love of God has taken root within our lives. The Holy Spirit has used these means of grace to plant and grow within us a faith that believes in God's Son as our Savior from sin.

B. The Soil Bears Fruit

In our Old Testament reading today the prophet Isaiah proclaims God's ancient promise, "My Word is effective, it will go out and accomplish its saving purpose and return to Me in the form of faithful, holy people." The seed of God's Word will take root and grow in the lives of people. That seed has found fertile soil in our lives. We now are part of God's harvest of faithful people whom He has gathered into His storehouse. We are joined together in a fellowship called the Holy Christian Church on earth. We look forward to the final harvest of faith where we will be with all God's people in the storehouse of eternal life.

For now we are on the other side of the harvest. By planting the seed of God's Word in our hearts to believe in Jesus as our Savior, the Holy Spirit also makes us sowers of that Word in the name of the Sower, Jesus Christ. By our lives, our words, our actions, we sow the seed which is God's good news of salvation in Jesus to all those around us. As we do so we must realize that we do not have equal gifts, opportunities or results in this effort. Notice the different yields of the harvest in Jesus' story. At a time when a tenfold harvest was considered good, thirty times that which was sown was great, sixty times was fantastic and a hundred times was incredible.

We cannot all be worldwide evangelists or foreign missionaries. We cannot all be big financial contributors or church leaders, but all of us can sow the seed. That is, each one of us can be what God has made us to be, His chosen people who live our faith in Jesus every day sharing our Savior with those around us. What's great about this is that we are under no pressure in doing so. We have no quotas to fill. Whether or not the soil receives the seed of God's Word is not our business. God does not call us to be successful sowers, but simply faithful farmers of His Word.

The farmer works hard, but the smart ones know that they don't grow the crop, God does. Likewise, we do not grow a crop of faith in the lives of those around us. The Holy Spirit does that through God's gracious, effective, and saving Word. God simply calls us to sow the seed of His Word, spreading the gospel of Jesus all around us. We may be blessed to see results of that sowing as others come to faith in Jesus. On the other hand, it may take years for the fruit of our sowing to blossom into a harvest of faith in someone else's life.

Our ears have heard and our eyes have seen the great love of our God in Jesus Christ our Savior. We are part of a harvest of faith which includes all who believe in Jesus for their lives. Now we sow that seed, share that message, and live that life trusting that God will use His Word to bring our friends, neighbors, and family members into that eternal harvest also. AMEN