Collect

O God, the Strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

February 20 Sermon

In the name of the Father, Son+, and Holy Spirit.

I sat down with this text, and I was like, “Oh, Parable of the Sower. Yeah, I know Parable of the Sower.” The guy goes out and throws the seed around, and it lands on different types of ground. And there’s a big lesson because the seed is like our faith, and the ground represents all these different things. Psh, easy. I got this.

But here’s the wild thing about Parables: Jesus didn’t speak in parable to help us understand things. He explicitly says that he uses the parable to keep people from understanding, not to use as an example to help them understand. He says, “I speak in parables *so that* seeing, they may not see; and hearing, they may not understand.”

Except I realize I only know what this parable means because like Mark or whoever was courageous enough to raise his hand way back when and be all, “Hey uh... Hey Jesus…” Right?

Let anyone who lacks wisdom ask His Father kind of a thing. The disciples were humble enough to ask for some wisdom here. In fact, they were *wise enough* to ask for wisdom. And then they were kind enough to write down the answer for the rest of us.

Yet there are parts of this parable that I don’t think we fully understand, even with the explanation being given to us directly. How do we apply this parable correctly to ourselves, to our lives?

Where do these words of our Lord convict us? Where do they give us rest?

So, let’s work our way backwards through it.

# The Good Soil

The Good Soil. Raise your hands if you’re the good soil. Just enough moisture so that the seed can be hydrated. Enough sunlight so we have that good Vitamin D thing going on. The right kind of dirt, you know, not too hard packed, but not too soft – just right.

I’m raising my hand because of all the… uh... *fertilizer* that I’ve got.

We all want to be that good soil. Ripe and ready to bear the seed of faith that God our Father plants within us. Ready to sprout and grow, a blossoming child of God in this fallen and wicked world.

# The Weeds

The question is: Are we that good soil? Well, let’s take a look at some of these other places that precious gift of faith is sown and compare!

Since we’re going backwards, we’ll look at the weeds next. The seed – faith, remember – is sown in this ground and grows up just fine. See, the soil is good. It’s rich in nutrients and minerals, well-watered, plenty of sun.

The problem here isn’t the soil, it’s the weeds. We have this amazing community garden out here, and I’m so excited to see it this spring, it’s so beautiful! But if weeds get in there and grow along side what we’re actually *trying* to grow, we won’t be able to get anything useful.

The reason weeds are *weeds* is because they’re parasitic plants. They soak up all the water, absorb all the minerals and nutrients out of the soil, and they leave nothing for the crops. They leech away the life of the crops.

Jesus compares this to the cares of the world. Specifically, the trappings of wealth, fleeting earthly pleasure, and *fleeting* earthly troubles.

Man, I’ve got to be honest here, I’m starting to think I’m not the good soil. This is probably more my speed. Good roots, good growth, but I’m too concerned with my life – it’s worries, it’s pleasures. How many times I wake up in the morning and instead of *immediately* dropping to my knees, next to my bed, and thanking the Good Lord that I got through the night safely, I check my Twitter notifications.

My morning routine is Coffee, Phone, and Wordle instead of Prayer, Praise, and the Bible.

Still, a good gardener can pull weeds, and Jesus is the best gardener we could ask for, so maybe it’s not all bad. Let’s move on.

# Rocky ground

The Rocky Ground is where we start to hit soil problems. The seed – faith, remember – is dropped into the rocky ground and sprouts immediately.

So, this isn’t seed dropped literally into rocks, right? It’s soil, but soil with a lot of rocks in it. It looks like good, rich soil, but it isn’t.

95% rocks. Just a sort of thin veneer of soil.

The thing about this soil is that the seed sprouts, it sprouts well. But because there isn’t actually much soil under the surface, there really isn’t much room for the roots to spread.

So, when the sun burns hot in the summer, the plant withers and dies. You see, it can’t pull enough moisture from the soil because the roots don’t have anywhere to go. Or when the rains come, they flood out the roots and either drown the plant or wash it away. Or if there is a big frost like we had a few weeks back, and the plant has no deep, warm roots to survive, it freezes and dies.

Jesus tells us this is persecution. And we can look at hard persecution if we want: Places like the Middle East, North Korea, and China. But I want to be a little bold with the text here and apply this to any kind of heat, if you will.

Now that I think about it, I can list off dozens of times just last week where someone at work made an off-color joke and I went along. Or expressed some kind of lifestyle that I know is wrong, but in the moment, surrounded by my peers, I either extolled, or simply chose to remain silent. Here I am, in my silence, persecuting and wounding the church myself, by not defending her.

How often I fail to do the work Christ has put before me out of my own fear of persecution. Out of a fear of suffering for the church, I cause suffering to the church.

But I mean, I can’t lose my job after all: It provides my daily bread! Except we know that isn’t true.

You know: Now that we’re talking about it, maybe I am this rocky ground.

# The Path

Well, God be praised nonetheless, I’m not the path. The seed – faith, remember - sown on the path and never even takes root! This seed gets trampled under the feet of passers-by, St. Mark tells us, before the birds (satan) comes along and plucks it up.

In Roman Catholic theology, they say it is *mortal sin* – that is, a **deadly** sin – when you knowingly and willfully ignore the command of the Lord in favor of committing sin. I’m not saying this because we believe in mortal sin. All sin is mortal sin, really. I bring it up because it’s a perfect example of the hard soil.

When you willfully know and do it anyway. I shouldn’t click on this website. I shouldn’t have this drink. I shouldn’t speak this way.

And yet, I absolutely know that I am going to.

And now here I am, once again, revising what soil I am in this passage.

# The Gospel

Here’s the thing Dear Christian. Dear child of God: You are the path. Your soil isn’t soil at all, it’s a hard worn, foot trodden path. How often the words of Our God bounce off my thick skull!

You’re also the rocky soil: Faltering and failing in the pressures of this world.

And you’re the soil with the weeds: Letting the cares, joys, worries, and tears of this world choke out your faith.

Oh, but there is some good news, beloved. I have the best news for you.

You are, without a doubt, the good soil.

You are here, you are baptized, you belong to God. You are repentant, truly repentant! Contrite for your sins, having confessed them before God and having been fully absolved.

What did the Lord tell our brother Isaiah: My Word will not return void. The snow and the rain – what we think stops us and drowns us – only serves to water the seed.

Our very baptisms, which drown our flesh and sin, in turn gives, waters, and grows this seed of faith in us.

And when you feel your faith isn’t firm enough, you have only to remember that your faith is not your own! You did not sow your own faith, you are not your gardener! But our Lord Jesus Christ is! And He made a way for your faith when he was betrayed and sent to this cross.

Here He atoned for every. Single. Sin that you have ever committed. Here, He gave Himself, that you would be forgiven.

And should, for some reason, you doubt that, he invites you to come to this table. Here, again, He gives Himself to you for the forgiveness of all your sin, that this gift of life may strengthen and encourage you.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters, if you worry that you are not the good soil, I want you to take heart: You are the good soil. Jesus has made you the good soil. And that is why you are here. He has brought you here in faith to partake of His Gifts.

He is the Gardener who plants the seed. It is He who waters the seed. And it is He who makes the soil good for growing.

And it is in His name that all of God’s people say,

Amen.