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St. Barnabas Anglican Church
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 The Parable of the Sower

Good Soil

Open with Prayer.

Jesus has a special way of telling his followers about his kingdom. He tells them stories, he tells them parables. These are stories that illustrate God and his Kingdom. These are wonderful stories that have an incredible depth of meaning to them. On this particular occasion in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus begins to teach a series of parables to the crowd that gathers around him. If you read on, Jesus will tell them of the weeds and the grain, and how both good and bad people live and grow in this world, but at the end, God will judge and divide all. And there's the parable of the great treasure, where a person finds a treasure in the field and selling everything he owns, buys the field, just so he can have that treasure. So we learn that the Kingdom of Heaven is so precious to us, that we should want to give up everything for it. But Jesus begins with this parable that we just heard, and I believe it is appropriate. You see, on this occasion, he was preaching to a mixed crowd. And by that I mean, before, when he preached, for example, the Sermon on the Mount, and had gone through Galilee performing miracles of healing and deliverance, he had preached to a willing crowd. The people wanted to hear from him. They liked him, because he had done great things for them. And as the word about Jesus spread, some people came to him in order to test what he had to say, especially the Pharisees and scribes. They might reject Jesus and his teachings. So now he was preaching to people who were not as receptive, and he begins with this parable, which about receptivity to the Gospel. So what does he say and what can it mean for us today?

Jesus opens by telling us of the sower or farmer. And this sower is God. And he sows his seed in the world, he is spreading his Word. And his Word falls on two different types of soil, Bad Soil, and Good Soil.

The Good and Bad Soil represents different responses to the Gospel. Good Soil accepts it, Bad Soil rejects it. And he explains how Bad Soil might reject God.

So the first type of Bad Soil is the hard soil, the path. It's packed down and nothing can be planted there. When God's Word encounters the hard soil, it is rejected, and the enemies of God snatch away what was sown. And this is not far-fetched for us. Because the biggest lie that exists today about God and spirituality is that we don't need to be saved. We are generally good. And so long as we lead a good life, so long as our good outweighs our bad, then if there is a heaven, we will get in. We live in a world that needs a savior, but it often doesn't understand that we need salvation. We need a savior. So the first type of Bad Soil rejects the Gospel because it has no faith in the Gospel, It rejects the fact that Jesus Christ came down from heaven to save sinners, to save everyone.

The second type of Bad Soil is a Shallow Faith. The Seed that fell on the shallow soil are those who readily accept the Gospel. They understand it and their need for salvation and they accept it with joy. Yet, their faith is not deep. They don't do anything to deepen their relationship with God. And the world and all God's enemies stand against the Gospel, and the moment that trouble that comes their way as a result of the Gospel, they fall away. They give up their faith and it dies.

So the last type of Bad Soil is soil that is choked with Thorns. These are the people who hear the Gospel, and even accept it, but the cares and concerns of the world choke or strangle our faith. Just like weeds and thorns suck away the nutrients that go into the plant, worries and

concerns choke out the nutrients that go into our souls. The pressures of this world are increasing. We suffer from a lack of money, there's not enough work, we are uncertain about the future, and about our health and about our families. And all these pressures can add up. And when these things add up, they can distract us from our relationship with God. The cares and concerns of the world are encroaching on people. And this can hinder our faith.

So until now, all we have talked about is the Bad Soil, and it seems like a pretty bleak picture, because all of us have fallen into being Bad Soil at one time or another. But then, Jesus tells us about Good Soil. When God sows his Word on this soil, it is taken up readily, and it grows and its roots go deep. So the point of the whole parable is to be good soil.

So, what is Good Soil? I think, that is the big question for this passage. How can we be Good Soil?

I think that the first thing we can say is that, Good Soil is the opposite of those poorer types of soil.

So, Good Soil accepts the Gospel. Good Soil has faith and allows God to work in your life. So if you wonder whether or not you are good soil, I think the first thing you can do is ask your spouse "Am I good soil?". But seriously, ask yourself these questions: Do you have Faith in the Gospel? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and he has saved us from our sins? Do you have confidence in your salvations? And are you receptive to the change that occurs in your heart when the Holy Spirit moves in?

Good Soil also deepens its faith. It doesn't remain shallow, but deepens it's relationship with God. So ask yourself, Have you gone deeper with your faith? Do you pray regularly? Do you hold your brothers and sisters in Christ up in prayer? Do you read Scripture as often as you

can? Do you worship Christ as regularly as possible? Do you receive Christ in the Sacraments of the Church? All these things deepen your relationship with God.

Thirdly, Good Soil is not overly concerned with the cares of this world. I know that this is probably the hardest one to accept for us. I am sure that many of us have been adversely affected by the economic conditions and we all worry from time to time. It's hard not to worry or concern yourself with these things. But are you leaving behind the world and its cares? Do you remember the goodness of God even in times of suffering? Do you remember that he is good and merciful and loving and ultimately for us? St. Paul wrote many of his letters from prison because he preached the Gospel. And he wrote over and over about his own joy in the Lord and how he counted everything in this life, both the good things that happened to him and the persecution, as nothing compared to the surpassing joy of knowing God. That is not being worried about the world's concerns for the sake of the Gospel.

There is another way to consider what is Good Soil, besides what it is not. Good Soil produces abundant crops. As Christians, we are expected to produce fruit for the Kingdom. So ask yourself, what difference has the Gospel made in your life? What has changed in you that is visible to others so that they see it and want that change for themselves? Have you forgiven others? Have you been healed physically, spiritually or emotionally? Have you experienced the love of God in your life? Do you see an inward change and have you shared that with others? Have you reached out to someone who is poor and needy? Have you met someone new and shared your faith with them? This is the immense harvest that Jesus was talking about when he said that Good Soil would produce a crop of 100-, 60-, and 30-fold. And the beautiful part of all this is that we do not have to be the perfect evangelist, we don't have to be qualified in order to produce this crop. Remember, in this parable God is the one who is sowing his Word. God does the work converting

people. He invites us to join him in this work by merely telling people about him, and by telling them what change he has made in our lives, and by helping people who need help and reaching out into the community.

So do you want to be Good Soil? Do you want to have the Gospel penetrate your heart? Do you want to have a deep relationship with God? Do you want to have the Holy Spirit deeply affect your life? And do you want to produce a crop for the Lord? The only prescription for this is to read Scripture as often as possible. To pray daily. Get into a group of fellow Christians who will build you up in the Lord and lift you up in prayer. Come to Church as often as you can to hear the Word preached and receive Jesus in the Sacraments. And be receptive to the change that God is making in you.

And when you feel like you have this Good Soil thing down, you need to go out for God. You need to listen for God's will and direction, because he will tell you who to meet and who to talk to for his sake. Don't stay stagnant. It is a continual process, just like how the crops come in year after year, you should be growing and producing for God year after year. Amen.