HE WHO HAS EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR

Jesus concluded His parable of the sower with the admonition: **He who has ears to hear, let him hear.** This was Jesus’ way of saying, “Pay attention to what I just told you. Listen closely, and remember what I said. God gave you ears; use them the way God intended.” Whenever a Scripture is read or preached on in Church, this admonition by Jesus should come to mind.

We try to help people listen to God’s Word in some practical ways. We print the Readings in the Bulletin so you can follow along if you wish; some people better concentrate on what is spoken when they have it written down in front of them. Or, if you have trouble hearing, the printed word is a great help. We have installed a public address system in church with microphones and speakers so the sound carries throughout this large space. We installed a hearing loop system so those who are hearing impaired and need to use hearing aids or cochlear implants can receive directly a broadcast without the ambient sound of the room. Personally, I try to speak clearly, loudly, and slowly enough so my proclamation of God’s Word can be heard and understood. Why do we make such an effort to make sure God’s Word is heard in Church?

Jesus’ explanation to the parable of the sower tells us why. He began His explanation this way: **Hear then the parable of the sower:** *When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.* I will deal later with what Jesus means by the various soils on which the seed of the Word is sown. First, we will recognize that Jesus is teaching us about hearing His Word when He uses the illustration of sown seed, and that the hearing of this Word takes place in His kingdom.

It is clear when reading the Gospel of Matthew that the kingdom Jesus refers to is a present reality. Jesus began His ministry by announcing: **Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand** (4:17). Jesus is the King and His kingdom arrived with His coming into the world. People are brought into Jesus’ kingdom by hearing His Word, believing and being baptized into Him.
Jesus began His teaching on the kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount by saying: **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven** *(5:2-3)*. He ended it with: **Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock** *(7:24)*. Jesus’ word of the kingdom builds His kingdom by creating faith in the hearts of those who hear Him. His disciples were in His kingdom then as much as we are today. And this kingdom will last for as long as God’s Word lasts, that is, forever.

Jesus’ parable of the sower is about what it is like in His kingdom. When we are in His kingdom we hear His Word. Thus, Jesus says: **He who has ears to hear, let him hear**. His explanation of the parable of the sower goes on to explain why Jesus’ **word of the kingdom** produces a harvest in some cases and in others does not.

There is nothing wrong with the seed of the Word sown; it is all good seed. But Jesus does note that His Word that is heard is **sown in the heart**. When there is no crop at the end, that is, no fruits of faith in Jesus, the problem is in the hearts of those who hear the Word, not the Word itself. In all His examples of soils that receive the sown seed, the Word is heard. That is a constant. What changes is the result based on how that Word is received in each one’s heart. Looking at what Jesus says, the question each one of us must ask is how we are hearing that Word.

**When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.**

The soil of a path is hard and beaten down so a seed sown there cannot penetrate it. It is left exposed so the birds can eat it up before it can even begin to grow. The point of comparison is a heart hardened to God’s Word so it does not understand it. People hear God’s Word in Christ but don’t let it grow to their hearts. This happens when people reject God’s Word because it goes against how they want to live; they don’t want to repent and give up their sinful lives. This happens when people come to church with the attitude that worship is boring, hearing God’s Word is boring, so they don’t pay any attention. In either case, the result is the same. Whether God’s Word is rejected or ignored, the devil is happy when the person takes nothing home.
As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

What lies behind a heart that is rocky ground is confusion over what it means to live in the kingdom. These people hear God’s Word as a way to be rewarded for their good works. “If I do everything God tells me to do, He will reward me, I’ll be happy and successful, and only good things will happen to me.” This is in essence a religion of law, not Gospel. People like this neither feel crushed by their sins nor feel a deep need to repent and receive God’s forgiveness in Jesus. They are usually very good at comparing themselves to others and judging themselves much better and more acceptable to God.

But when suffering comes their way, or the world opposes them for what they say they believe, they consider God unfair and the cost of being faithful to God by living according to His Word too expensive. People who are “rocky soil” are happy to be considered Christians only as long as it doesn’t cost them anything. This is a shallow faith that won’t last when trials come.

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

Again, these people hear the Word of God, but they make the cares of life and chasing after money and what money buys the most important things in their lives and they choke out hearing God’s Word. Jesus said: No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money (6:24). People who choose to live among the thorns like to play God’s Word off the “real world.” Their thinking goes something like: “The Bible may say that, but that’s not the way the world works today. No one thinks or lives that way anymore. I have to live my life the way I want, and you have no right to tell me what I’m doing is wrong.” People who think and believe like this don’t like their sins called sins, don’t want to repent of them, and end up rejecting God’s Word of forgiveness for them.
As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.

Jesus comes to the main point of His parable: God’s Word that is heard and understood in faith produces growth and life that endure for the harvest, that is, eternal life with God in His kingdom. The seed of God’s Word that is planted in the hearts of people who understand it in faith produces good works. It is as God promised through the prophet Isaiah:

So shall My word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it (55:11).

By His Word, God succeeds in saving lost and dying sinners. God’s Word in Jesus forgives us in the waters of Holy Baptism and makes us children of God. God’s Word in Jesus cleanses us of our sins and comforts us that we are not rejected by God but accepted by Him in Christ. God’s Word in Jesus is joined to bread and wine and gives us the daily bread of Christ’s body and blood that forgives our sins and nourishes us along the way to eternal life, promising us that just as Jesus rose from the dead we too will be raised in our bodies to eternal life with Him forever.

The parable of the sower was spoken to Jesus’ disciples and followers even as it is spoken in the Church today. This means that all of us are hearers of the Word of Jesus, Word that is spoken to us to accomplish the purpose for which God sent it. This means that we must not harden our hearts to the hearing of God’s Word so we do not understand it, and it is taken away from us. This means that if the soil of our hearts is shallow do to rockiness, we need to “pick rock” in our fields so when tribulations and persecutions arise we have depth of soil to endure them. This means that the thorn-like cares of the world and deceitfulness of riches that tempt us need to be killed with the herbicide repentance. And hearing God’s Word with understanding we can trust that the life God has for us in Jesus is not only better than the world has to offer but is real life that endures forever. **He who has ears to hear, let him hear.** Amen.