



Saint John United Methodist Church  
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Message for January 16, 2022  
“Fruitfulness: Good Soil”  
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb  
Scripture: Matthew 13:18-23

## Fruitfulness

We begin a new sermon series this morning. Over the next seven weeks we will consider what it means to be fruitful. In the mix of that we will also consider what it means to be unfruitful. All along we will consider any number of agricultural images that emerge from scripture. They will give us a clear understanding about the sort of fruitfulness God intends for our lives.

## So Far This Year

So far this year, we have heard Ashlee talk about the Great Commission which, of course, is found in Matthew 28:19-20. The title of her sermon was “*Therefore.*” “***Therefore, go into all the world and make disciples.***”

The next week we welcomed Will Partin to share what’s going on at Go Ministries. The title of his sermon was “*Go.*” “***Therefore, go into all the world and make disciples,***” was lifted up yet again.

Will based his sermon on Mark, chapter 4. He told us he wouldn’t cover everything in the chapter. He didn’t “*want to wear us out.*”

As I began to prepare for this morning a week and a half ago, I discovered that Mark 4 is the basis for Matthew 13, the very chapter we’ll be covering over the next three weeks. I promise, just like Will did, not to wear you out. 😊

All these things were planned independently. I get the idea that God wants us to talk about such things—about going and making disciples, about being fruitful in every way. Let’s hear then this reading from Matthew 13:18-23, Christ’s explanation of the Parable of the Soils.

## Matthew 13:18-23

*“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”*

## The Parable of the Soils Explained

In the Parable of the Soils, Jesus talks about four different soils that receive seed, each with varying results. Clearly, Jesus in talking about those soils, speaks about the disposition of our hearts and the hearts of others who stand to receive the good news of God's love. In explaining this parable as he did, Jesus didn't want to leave anything to chance. He wants us to hear loud and clear about how important the disposition of our hearts really is.

- The first of the four soils Jesus talks about is the hard soil you find along a path. The seed might fall there, but the birds come and snatch it away. Jesus here references the sort of heart where the power of evil has way too much sway. You might say that such a heart is a **hardened heart**. A hardened heart is hardened to the ways of God, making it tough for God to break through--not impossible, just tough.
- The second of the four soils Jesus talks about is the sort of soil where rocks lie just beneath the surface. I know you have tried to dig whether in your yard or elsewhere and have encountered that kind of thing. It is not easy getting through.

Rocky soil represents those hearts that readily receive the good news of God, but don't really let that good news take root. People with that kind of heart just skim the surface when it comes to spiritual things. Over time the spark that was once there withers and dies. If the first heart is a hardened heart, this one is a **shallow heart**.

- The third of the four soils is the soil where things do grow and prosper, but get choked out by weeds and thorns. You might say this soil represents a **strangled heart**. "*The worries and cares*" of this life, coupled with the "*deceitfulness of wealth*" have a way of choking God out. At best, God plays second fiddle.

I remember years ago standing in a farm field with one of my parishioners. It was fall and he was harvesting his bean crop. The whole time we talked he stood cutting away honeysuckle from his combine. As he did, he lamented how much the honeysuckle had affected his crop.

The worries and cares of this world, coupled with the deceitfulness of stuff has a way of affecting God's fruitfulness in our lives as well.

- The fourth soil Jesus talks about is the soil where the seed is readily received. The seed is not only readily received, but allowed to do its thing. This soil points to the heart that not only hears but cooperates with what God is trying to do. You might say it is a **surrendered heart**. The fruitfulness of this kind of heart is many-fold.

A surrendered heart makes a difference. It is fruitful in many ways. People are helped, supported, and comforted. Still others are challenged to draw closer to Christ. Those same people who then challenge others to draw closer to Christ. God's love is evident, and his Kingdom is furthered. All of this, of course takes place only with his help.

## The Parable of the Extravagant Farmer

When it comes to being fruitful, God's help is where we need to focus. I firmly believe that God is the difference between a fruitful and unfruitful life. He stands to guide us, strengthen us, and even empower us to be the sort of people he wants us to be.

Given that, our focus with this morning's parable is not on the soils, but upon God. A consideration of the soils is important, but not at the expense of considering what the farmer does. Some have said that *The Parable of the Soils* might best be titled, *The Parable of the Extravagant Farmer*. I like that.

Our God is extravagant in every way.

- He is all about showering his love upon us.
- He is all about making the seemingly impossible, possible.
- He is all about taking an otherwise unfruitful life and making it fruitful.

The emphasis of this parable is not on the seed, but the sower. The emphasis is on God, and not us.

Rick Warren in the very first sentence of his book, *The Purpose Driven Life* puts it well, "*It's not about you.*"

We serve an extravagant God. He liberally broadcasts the seed of his Kingdom. While some of it may fall on unfavorable soil, God keeps on sowing to miraculous affect. The fruitfulness God brings about in our lives is nothing short of miraculous, no less miraculous than a seed that comes to flower.

I have come to understand that about my own life. God is able to do great things, in spite of myself and my shortcomings. After all, God is still in the business of working miracles.

### **Grass Where a Tree Once Stood**

Cheryl and I have a patch of ground in our front yard where we are trying to grow grass. It's the spot where a huge elm tree used to stand. We had to take it down last summer. I worked and worked on that part of the yard after the tree was cut down and the stump was ground out. I was preparing it to grow a little grass.

I eventually got things to the place where I could sow some seed. As you can see, grass is growing in spots and not in others. Some of the soil is fertile and some is not. I planted the seed a bit out of season last fall. To be honest with you, I was surprised when anything came up. What I witnessed was nothing short of miraculous.

That's the way it is when God extravagantly showers the seeds of his Kingdom upon our lives. He can do great things when we give him half a chance. When we're all in, theirs is absolutely no limit to what he can do.

### **How Does Your Garden Grow?**

We also have a raised garden in our side yard. For the three years plus years, the garden has been a mess. I mean a mess. There was plenty of rock, lots of old landscaping carpet, and an overabundance of weeds. Last summer Cheryl and I tore into it with the hope of one day making a flower garden. I look forward to planting seed there in just a few months. I have the distinct feeling that that patch of ground will blossom into a thing of beauty. I'll keep you posted.

So then, how does your garden grow?

God longs to do wonderful things in your life. He longs to bring you to flower to the end that you will bear fruit, thirty, sixty, even a hundred-fold. God bless us all as we allow God to do his thing in our lives.