

## **“No other way...” Mt 13:1-23**

**That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.” [...] “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. This is what was sown along the path. 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. 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. 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.”**

This parable of Jesus is especially relevant for us, and by ‘us’ I mean us, our congregation. As right now we all together reflect on what it means to be the body of Christ, the disciples of Jesus here in Barossa today. Hopefully we can gain some clarity as we meditate upon Jesus’ words.

There is something I miss a lot from the time when I wasn’t a pastor. Listening to the preaching and attending Bible Studies, as one of Jesus’ followers. Being able to leave the Divine Service, or a Bible study and to discuss with my family and friends what we have just heard.

Reflecting on how words of Jesus were explained, what they mean for us today and how could we use what we just have heard to witness to others about our wonderful God.

Think for a moment of these words of Jesus. He said them to His disciples, right after He had told them the parable of the Sower. “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven...”

Did you hear? To you as Jesus’ disciples it is given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

Isn't this amazing? Think about the faithful of the Old Testament times, think about Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah, and many others. They longed to be able to hear what you can hear every Sunday... and they didn't hear it.

To you it is given to hear the mystery, which, as Paul writes, was kept secret for long ages, but now is revealed. To you it is given to listen to things, which, as Peter writes, even angels long to look in.

They are given to you. Right here. Every time when you hear a pastor preaching the Word of God, it is Jesus Himself speaking to you through His messengers. Of course, we are imperfect and sometimes strange messengers, but the message is His. It is your God, your Lord and Savior speaking to you, calling you to Himself, revealing to you His mysteries.

What happens, when someone in government says something important? It is all over the news, on TV, in newspapers, etc. And we desire to hear it. We are curious, we are interested, we don't want to miss a word. How many hours per week do we spend taking in news of this world, and how interested we are?

But here we have the Eternal God, the Lord of the Universe, the Creator and the Redeemer, the One in whose hands is everything in heavens and on earth, and He desires to speak to you His life-giving and Spirit-filled words, and He expects us to listen. And we...

Do we even appreciate it? Do we even realize what unbelievable privilege is given to us? Where is our excitement that we are chosen to have such opportunity? Where is our curiosity to listen and to understand and to share?

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Lutheran church was born, the big problem was that instead of listening to the Word of God and trusting the promises of Jesus, people trusted in rituals.

Many believed that if only they keep participating in churchly rituals, God should be pleased with them. They were not interested in Jesus' words. Just take your part in a ritual, and that should suffice.

We are heirs of the church that was born from listening to the Triune God as He speaks to us in His Word. But I am afraid that in many cases we are no different than the church that Martin Luther and his colleagues tried to reform.

It seems that there are many, who think that the Church is about ritual only. If they like the ritual, they are happy to participate in it. And they are critical and suspicious if there are any changes, if something doesn't happen as they want.

If they don't like the ritual, as it is often the case with younger generations, they just stay away, or demand that the church would create rituals that would please them. But they both are wrong, for none of them are interested in what truly matters, – in the Word of God.

It is true, we have this very rich liturgical tradition, which connects us with the Church universal all around the world, with the Reformers, with the apostolic church and even with the church of the Old Testament.

But our focus should not be on the ritual only, but on the Word which comes to us in orderly way thanks to our liturgy. Our focus should be on the Word that Jesus Himself speaks to us through His servants, pastors.

For when God speaks, His Word creates a new reality. “In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” It brings us into God’s presence. “I forgive you all your sins.” Your sins are forgiven in heaven. All of them. “Take and eat, given and shed for you.” The holy God unites you with Himself as He feeds you in His holy meal.

And the reading from the Bible and the sermon. This is Jesus speaking to you. Showing you your sins, so that you could repent, and turn back to your merciful God, who proclaims to you His undeserved grace and unchanging love.

Who tells you about everything He has done for you and has prepared for you. Who reveals to you how important you are for Him, and to what length He is ready to go to get you in His Kingdom.

We tend to forget these things. We need to be reminded of the secrets of God’s Kingdom every day. We need to hear about Jesus’ love to us, for His love creates love and life in our hearts as well.

The Word is important. The Word is what matters. The Word is what creates a new reality, makes us children of God and heirs of His Kingdom, bestows on us new hearts and makes us wise. The all-powerful Word does all of this.

And you can easily test yourself and see how important it is for you to listen to Jesus as He speaks to you. Are you among those who complain that a sermon was 3 minutes too long?

Or, when the service is over, when the Bible Study is over, what do you want to discuss? What is on your mind, and on your lips, – the Word of life that you’ve just heard, or maybe ... weather, politics, rumors, etc. Examine yourselves.

And it is true, as Jesus told in this parable, there are many obstacles to the life-giving Word of God. Jesus lists the most significant ones. First, the seed sown along the path. Satan does whatever he can to snatch God’s Word away from us.

For there is only one power that can take you away from under his control, and it is the Word of God. And we make it easier for him, if we don’t try to understand what Jesus is speaking to us. For it is especially when we don’t understand what Jesus speaks to us, when the Word is easily taken away.

So, brothers and sisters, pray for the Holy Spirit to enlighten you. If you don’t understand what God speaks to you in His Word, ask your pastors, and they will do their best to help you. For this is the main reason why Jesus has called us.

Think about it, Jesus not only speaks to you, but He also provides for you His servants to guide you in all the depth and beauty of His message. This is how important it is for Jesus that you listen to and understand His message.

Then Jesus speaks about the seed sown on the rocky ground. He speaks about people who are happy to receive the Word, but the Word can't have roots in them. The ground of their hearts is too rocky.

That is, our hearts are too hard, we want to cling to our old ways, and when Jesus invites to change our lives and to follow Him, the price seems too high. We don't want to commit to Jesus.

We don't want to look strange in the eyes of the world. And we don't want to go against the world. We are not ready to experience any inconveniences that following Jesus may cause. And the seed withers.

Thirdly Jesus speaks about the seed sown among thorns. Here He speaks about people who hear the Word, but then the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of this world choke the Word.

Deceitfulness and cares. There are many, many blessings of our gracious God that we experience every day. I am talking about good things. Our problem is that we easily turn good things into the most important things.

Marriage. 'I've got married and need to spend as much time as possible with my spouse.' Children. 'God has blessed me with children, and I need to do as much for them as possible. We need some family time.'

'Thanks to God, I've got a new job. But, of course it takes time and commitment if I want to have a good career.' 'God has blessed me and my business is growing, and it is very busy time for me.'

'I have got into this new sport's team, this is such an opportunity for me, and I need to commit to it.' 'I have got into university, and I need to think about my future, and it is not easy at all.'

You see, all these are good things. Good gifts of our generous God, but, if we love something else more than Jesus, these good things choke the Word, and there are no fruits.

Finally, Jesus speaks about the last group of people. These are those who hear the Word and understand it. For only when you understand you have a confidence to share it with others.

And this group, they bear "fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty." I pray that we all would long to belong to this group as people who hear the Word and understand it.

What can we learn from this parable? How can it help us to gain clarity reflecting on what it means for us to be the body of Christ here today? I'll mention just two things. And the first one is so obvious that we can't miss it.

What causes us to bear fruit? What makes us fruitful? Yes, we may not like the answer, but here it is, – the Word of God. The Triune God calls, creates and sustains His Church, His holy people by His Word.

By His Word and in no other way. There are many others great things we as Jesus' disciples can do, but only the Word of God creates and sustains faith. And it is not that hard to be Jesus' disciples.

See, we all commit to so many different worldly activities. But here we are to commit to listening to the Triune God as He reveals to us the secrets and mysteries of His Kingdom. Besides, we have the Holy Spirit to help us in this journey. What a joy and privilege it is!

If we want to be fruitful as Jesus' disciples here is Barossa, let just keep the 3rd commandment. Let's fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it.

The second thing is about Jesus. Have you ever met a sower so wasteful? Three forth of the seed are wasted. However, He is not wasteful, He is abundant in His generosity and desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

This is, why Jesus has called us and sends us to tell the whole world about what He has done. He doesn't care if most of that seed is wasted. There is no shortage with this God. And we shouldn't worry about it either.

We are to do as Paul wrote: "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season." Use every opportunity! And don't worry about the fruits! Trust what the Lord of the Church has said through Isaiah the prophet:

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 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."

Amen.