

“Listen!”

The Parable of the Sower is often thought to be a teaching about Christians doing evangelism – growing the church. However, Jesus’ message in our Scripture is more about how his disciples need to “listen” and understand the message or Gospel of the Kingdom of God, so we are able to put it into practice – live the way of the Kingdom of God – the New Faith Relationship with God – the New Life in Christ. Jesus indicated this listening emphasis in today’s Reading. **In verses 9 and 18, Matthew reported, “And Jesus concluded, ‘Listen, then, if you have ears!’” and “Listen, then, and learn what the parable of the sower means.”**

Now, there are at least two different ways of understanding what Jesus was communicating. Usually, folks see what Jesus was doing was his explanation of the meaning of the different parts of the parable. However, if we analyze what Jesus said, then I believe we will realize he was using the experience of sowing seed to help his followers recognize the way their environment will impact how they listen to and understand the way of the Kingdom of God – life in the New Faith Relationship with God – the New Life in Christ. In Jesus’ explanation, he said “hear or receive the message about the Kingdom of God” for each of the four environments he described and he told of the response of those, who were supposed to hear or listen in each of those environments.

Charles Hoffacker shared a story about, “a young anthropologist named Connie who works among aboriginal people in Australia.” He explained, “The community where she lives has a rich tradition of storytelling. Everyone gathers at night, a story is told, and then another, and another. Connie feels extraordinarily privileged when she is asked to join in this activity.”

Hoffacker continued, “The first story told that evening is about the animal ancestor of this community and its adventures at the beginning of time. The story overflows with detail, action, imagery.

At the end of the story, Connie is delighted. ‘May I ask a question?’ she says. ‘What does it mean?’”

Explaining the response, Hoffacker said, “All eyes are upon her. The elder looks at her gravely and says, ‘That is the one question you cannot ask.’ A long time passes before she is invited again. She has asked the wrong question.”

Hoffacker concluded, “‘What does it mean?’ was the wrong question for Connie to ask about the aboriginal myth. It may also be the wrong question for us to ask about the story of the sower, or any of the stories told by Jesus. ‘What does it mean?’ is the wrong question if we think that by having an answer, we can somehow get a handle on this story, domesticate it, make it safe. The stories Jesus tells are not subject to our control. He tells these stories so that we can be transformed. He tells these stories, not so that we can ask questions about them, but so that the stories can ask questions of us.” (Charles Hoffacker, “What Kind of Soil Are You, What Kind of Sower?”)

Jesus’ Parable of the Sower leads us to ask ourselves the question, “Am I living in one of the three negative environments Jesus described? Am I allowing something in my life to cause me to not listen to the message of the Kingdom of God – to not live in the New Faith Relationship with God – to not live the New Life in Christ? Jesus gave explanations about three negative situations for the seeds and the receiving of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. **These three negative life settings are:**

- ▶ **ignoring or being ignorant of the Gospel,**
- ▶ **not taking the Gospel seriously,**
- ▶ **and being worried about life and loving riches.**

With reference to ignoring or being ignorant of the Gospel, as described by Jesus in verse 19, such would be believers or followers of Jesus might have the opportunity to listen to the message but it would quickly be snatched away from them! In that case, a person is unable to live in accordance with the Kingdom of God – the New Faith Relationship with God – the New Life in Christ because in their ignoring the message or ignorance of it, the Gospel never leads them to understand – to have faith in Jesus and God’s Agape Love.

In verses 20-21, not taking the Gospel seriously was raised up by Jesus. He pointed out how those, who don't take the message seriously, don't allow faith – trust in Jesus and God's Love to grow in them and they give up the way of the Kingdom of God – the New Faith Relationship with God – the New Life in Christ, as soon as there is trouble or a threat against them.

In verse 22, being worried about life and loving riches was the last of the negative situations for receiving or listening to the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. This is the environment, which is the most common danger for Christians today. A worried life and/or one, which is focused on chasing money and wealth, leads to the rejection of the Life of the Kingdom of God – of the New Faith Relationship with God – the New Life in Christ. Further, to me, the “worried life” includes a life controlled by anger, prejudice, hate, envy, etc. That kind of living leads to not listening to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and God's Agape Love. It ends in bondage to worries, fears, and greed.

Before we examine closely the one positive environment for the seed and the reception of the Gospel, which Jesus spoke about, let's view the following brief video. (The “Let Go” video was shown.) We need to remember that our Divine Parent has never dropped us once and never will! We need to “let go” – live out our Faith – Trust in God's Agape Love for us – by Listening to and Understanding the message of the Still Speaking God, God's Son, Jesus, and the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Instead of ignoring or being ignorant of the Gospel or of not taking it seriously or of being controlled by worldly living and riches, the positive life setting for Christians, who listen to and understand the Gospel Message is the one in which we are fruitful! As I mentioned earlier, many have tried to explain the Parable of the Sower to be exclusively about evangelism – growing the church in membership. However, Jesus actually, was calling us to listen to the message that we need so we manifest the life of the Kingdom of God – the New Faith Relationship with God – the New Life in Christ! Being fruitful – living the New Life in Christ is serving others – agape loving all people – looking out for the welfare of others, especially the vulnerable, and we are to seek justice for everyone.

“Bearing fruit” is both the sign of listening to and understanding the message or way of the Kingdom of God – New Faith Relationship with God – New Life in Christ and an essential part of the experience, which enables us to stay away from or avoid those negative environments that prevent us from living the fruitful life of the Kingdom of God. Serving – doing ministry in the local congregation, in the community, and the world's one expression of “bearing fruit”. So, ironically, serving more, helps us bear more fruit and to break free from those negative environments – those temptations and bondages, which result in an unhappy and self-destructive life. In line with that truth, let me give you a heads up with reference to an upcoming service opportunity. Round Grove United Church UCC will again be participating in the Metrocrest CROP Walk. It will be held in the morning on Saturday, September 16th. We will be signing up volunteer Walkers and Donors in August, so it is not too early to begin thinking about doing one or both of those volunteer service activities. Additionally, it would help to have one or more persons volunteer to be our volunteer coordinators. They will need to attend the CROP Coordinator Rally at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, August 7th, at the Metrocrest Offices and then facilitate the signing up of our volunteer Walkers and Donors. If you are interested in helping coordinate our CROP Volunteer Walker Program, please let me know, as soon as possible.

Jesus calls us to “Listen” to the Gospel of the Kingdom of God – to the message of the Still Speaking God – Jesus' message and example of service and agape love. He calls us to listen, so we are not prisoners to those three negative environments. He calls us to listen, so we are fruitful – serve one another and all people in need and agape love everyone. Are you listening? Will you be fruitful – serve and love? Amen.