

Sermon: 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

Text: Luke 8:4-15 (vv;8b.15)

Theme: Sowing the Word of God – What hinders the growth

Goal: We need to be aware of what the temptations are that hinder the growth of God's Word in our hearth; but also be sure that the seed grows and produces fruit for salvation by God's grace.

Introduction: Something that had always concerned me at the beginning of my ministry when I was working in my first mission in São Paulo was: Why so many people have the opportunity to hear God's Word of Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, but only very few remained in the church and confessed their faith? I had many opportunities to sow the good seed of the Gospel among children and adults at the small church we had and in the homes, which were always open to pastor's visit; many invited us to host a Bible Study in their home; many began Adult Catechism Class to become a Christian Lutheran, and even many finished it; but few remained. The growth was slow, but constant.

I was concerned about my kind of ministry: I was sowing the good seed; was I not watering it properly? Was I not cleaning around to take the weed out? Was it my fault?

Through this Parable of the Sower, God helped me to understand how things work in His Kingdom. (This is another comparison about God's Kingdom among us, the third one in the past three Sundays). My task was to sow the good seed and to take care of it. The growth doesn't depend on me.

There are several conditions that hinder the growth of the seed, as we know also by experience in our own garden. These external conditions are called by the Bible as "temptations"; and Jesus explained three of these adverse conditions that hinder a

seed to grow and to produce fruit. - Luther summarized them in a trilogy called: The devil, the world and our own flesh, or, our sinful nature. They are well illustrated in this parable, and we need to be aware of them so that we will not be fruitless plants in the Kingdom of God or that we will not even fall astray; but that our faith will grow more and more and produce much fruit!

## I – The devil

The devil is always around where the good seed of the Gospel is being sown, looking for an opportunity to catch it, like birds that are looking for food when the seeds fall on the sidewalk. Due to all new technology we have, it was never so easy to spread the Gospel to all, as Jesus said: “Preach the Good News to all creation” (Mark 16:15). We don’t need to knock door by door anymore to reach someone and to witness to him. Everyone has a computer, a cell phone or other device where he navigates all around the world. There are plenty of sites where the Word of God can be proclaimed. You don’t need to carry your Bible anymore; you can download it on your cellphone. Facebook brings lots of messages, some of them a very good witness about Jesus and His work for us.

Does the devil allow the Good Seed to reach the heart of all? No; they are so distracted with the endless options offered that few take time to read the Bible and good messages.

There are so many people walking on the street that the Word of God is “trampled” as Jesus said, and no one notice it. They don’t stop to listen, but they just go forward or in circles... where? Nobody knows; but the end of their path is not secure.

## II – The world

“Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.” Maybe you know

someone who fits this description. How many visitors have visited St. Thomas just during the time I'm here? I have more than 70 in my e-mail list. They receive every week the E-Bulletin, the sermon and the prayers. Some are coming regularly; others disappeared.

"Testing" is not just persecution. Troubles, problems, doubts, sickness, family issues and so on are tests: Do we trust in God above all things, or not? This means: Don't apply this part of the parable only to others. We are vulnerable too! How deep are our roots? Are we firm to support testing and the storms when they attack us? The world where we live is cruel, and does not spare the Christians. New Christians are more vulnerable, because their roots are just beginning to grow.

III – Ourselves (our sinful nature)

"The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures and they do not mature." This, specifically has to do with us. The seed has grown in our heart. We are Christians. But "life's worries, riches and pleasures" always try to hinder our faith and our Christian life. There are so many options around us, and our flesh, our old Adam, our sinful nature is always tempted to follow the other way and to give up the true faith and God's path. How many Christians, even church leaders and pastors, have fallen by the sideway? A prayer that I like says: *"We are weak, Lord; and even when Your strong hand hold us firm, we stumble and fall into temptations. Help us!"* (Sing dem Herrn, p. 865).

The plant is there; but the thorns around it don't allow it to mature and to produce fruits. We have to examine ourselves constantly and allow God to take out the weed that surrounds us.

IV – The sower

But we are not alone as sowers. There is a greater Sower behind us, to whom the seed belongs. It is Jesus Himself. The promise of God through Isaiah <sup>(55:11)</sup> remains true: “So is the word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

Therefore, the parable ends with a word of hope and assurance: “But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.”

It is written in the Book of Acts about the people in the city of Berea, when Paul preached the Gospel there: “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men” (Acts 17:11,12).

*Conclusion: The parable is not actually about an exhortation to us to be good soil, because we by nature are not a good soil. But it is a sober evaluation of what we should expect as sowers. This will not always bear the fruit we would want or perhaps expect. People are frequently resistant to the good work of the Word. But that does not make the sowing invalid or unimportant.* (Phil Brandt, p. 38)

The Word of God, the good seed of the Gospel of Jesus, has been sown abundantly in our hearts. Let us not despise it, but welcome it always, not being resistant to God's grace and opportunity He gives us, or lukewarm and indifferent to His saving love in Jesus. God has great and eternal plans for us, and He wants and gives us the condition to produce much fruit of faith and love in His Kingdom. Amen.