

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen

The British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge was once engaged in a conversation with a man who believed children should never receive any kind of religion, education, or instruction.....

- Not until they were old enough to decide for themselves what they wanted to believe.
- This would allow them the freedom to choose whatever religion they wanted to believe in, rather than have one imposed upon them by their families.

Instead of disagreeing out loud, Coleridge invited the man to his home to visit his garden.

- When the man entered, he was shocked to find an overrun, neglected plot of land.
- “Do you call this a garden?” The man shouted.
- There is nothing here but weeds.

“Well, you see,” Coleridge said, “I did not wish to infringe upon the liberty of the garden in any way.”

- “I was just giving the garden a chance to express itself and to choose its own production.”

The garden is used here to illustrate a key point about raising our children and being in God’s Word.

- But it also illustrates the challenges and work required to have a good, eye pleasing, and product yielding garden.

The Bible frequently talks of gardens.

- In fact, the garden is literally from the beginning of the Bible to the end.
- In Genesis is the Garden of Eden.
- We have the Garden of Gethsemane.
- The garden of Jesus’ tomb and resurrection. Here Mary Magdalene mistook Jesus to be the gardener.
- And in Revelation is described the heavenly garden.

Jesus also uses gardens extensively in His teaching in parables.

- Today in our Gospel reading, the Parable of the Sower, is no exception to this.

I’m sure you remember the parable well.

- The seed is God’s Word.

- And the Sower sows the seed on 4 types of soil.
- Each soil type or condition representing how receptive the hearts of various groups of people are to God's Word and the experiences associated with this.

I think many times we look at this parable as an outsider looking in.

- That is, we don't see ourselves in the middle of it and directly applying it to ourselves.

Certainly the seed is the Word of God; and we know we are to proclaim God's Word in all soil conditions to all people.

- That is true.
- But sometimes then our focus goes to those to whom we are to sow the seed or proclaim the Gospel.
- But today I want to look at all this from a little different perspective.
- I want us to put ourselves in the middle of all this. Take it more personal.
- I would like for us to look at this as we sowing the seed to ourselves and what soil conditions we are. In effect, what does your garden look like?

Today, using the Parable of the Sower, I would like you to get your hands dirty.

- I've entitled this message, "Planting Your Garden."

Many of you have some experience at growing a garden. Most of you, probably extensive experience.

- All of us with eating the produce from the garden.

There are 3 important, absolutely critical, things, with a garden and the fruit it produces that I would like to focus in on this morning.

- The seed.
- The sowing or the planting of the seed.
- And the soil.

First the seed.

- Having proper seed, having good seed is critically important.
- You can't expect to have the green beans you wanted when you planted peas.
- You can't expect the seed to sprout and grow and produce if you have not cared for it and kept it in good condition.

- And, the good seed you planted will be challenged if other seed is put in with it. That is a whole other parable that Jesus teaches.

It is critical that the seed we use is the truth and purity of God's Word.

- Not mixed with falsehoods. Not mixed with our own feelings or ideas.

And why would we not want to make sure the seed that we use is God's Word in all its truth and purity?

- Think about this. Our almighty, all-powerful God has chosen to speak to us.
- We do not have to speculate on who He is, what He is like, or how we are to respond to Him.
- He shows us and tells us in His Word.

And that seed in its truth and purity is all powerful.

- With that Word He created us.
- It is that same Word that drew you here today.
- It is that same word that invited you to come to Him to find rest.

It is the same word that recreated you as a forgiven child of God to be with Him for all eternity.

- It is that same word that was spoken over you today when you were absolved of all your sins.
- It is that same Word that gives you peace, and comfort, and strength
- It is the same Word that gives you the calmness and confidence you need as you are getting ready to be taken down to the operating room for surgery.
- It is the same Word that gives you hope and a future when you are laying to rest a loved one.
- It is the same Word that today will be spoken over the bread and wine as it is changed into the very body and blood of Christ.

God's Word is absolutely critical and essential to have a garden with good fruit.

- God's Word is absolutely critical and essential to our church here at Hope and your life.

We now move on to sowing the seed.

- When we most of the time think of sowing seed....we think of proclaiming God's Word to others.
- And that is true and important.
- But remember, today we are looking at all this from the perspective of ourselves.

How are you doing at sowing seed for yourself?

- Said more directly versus being in metaphor.....
- How much time, how are you doing in being in God's Word that we just talked about giving us refuge and strength? How is your garden looking?

Bible studies here at Hope.

- Said as kindly as I can but to be honest, our attendance, our participation in Sunday morning Bible study is pretty anemic.
- There are many not taking the opportunity to receive God's Word from 8:30 to 9:15 on Sunday mornings.

Why not?

- Perhaps 8:30 seems a bit too early for you. I hope not.
- That extra 45 minutes on Sunday morning can not be near as valuable as God's Word.

Perhaps you hesitate because you feel uncomfortable.....you will be put on the spot.

- I promise you, you will not.
- We work hard to make everyone welcome and fit in.
- Page numbers are given for Bible passages we look up.
- You never are required to read or answer.
- We care not where you are at....we care that your garden is growing and bearing fruit.

The same goes for our 10:00 Bible study on Tuesday's.

- Men's Breakfast Fellowship is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month.
- We had our July meeting yesterday.

And I've said this before, but if we need more Bible studies, we will find a way to have them.

- God's Word, proper seed, is too critical to do otherwise.
- Statistics have shown that if 66 percent or two-thirds of the people that are in church on Sunday will be in a Bible study sometime during the week, that church will flourish and grow.

That is our church Bible studies.

- How about your private time in God's Word?
- How about your daily devotions? Many good sources exist.
- Other than on Friday's or days we have church services, I live stream and post a daily devotion each day on our Facebook page.
- We have Portals of Prayer.

- If you need more resources, please see me. It is too critical to do otherwise.

Another opportunity to sow the seed on your own garden is Church Services.

- You are here today. Thank you.
- And for me to even bring this up today is running the risk of “preaching to the choir.”

But I ask you.....do you seize all the opportunities given to you to be in God’s House?

- It is too critical to do otherwise.

I think sometimes all these opportunities we are talking about can be seen as cold, burdensome, or even out of touch and boring.

- It is almost as if Lutherans have a rule that you can’t smile, or have fun or joy in a Bible study.
- It is not that way.

It is so important that we be together in fun and fellowship and God’s Word.

- Most of the time our studies offer coffee and refreshments also.
- Planting a garden can be fun and a great, productive way to spend your time.

Notice also in the parable that Jesus teaches us today.....

- The seed was sown quite extravagantly.
- There were no limits on its quantity or where it fell.

Next is the soil.

- What kind of soil are you?
- Jesus gives to us 4 conditions.
- Notice in the parable, 3 of the 4 types of soil produce no crops.

The first one, the soil is hard, like concrete. The seed lays on top of the soil and the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown.

- Could this be you?
- God’s Word is words with no meaning to you.
- You have trouble understanding them.
- Your time in Bible study yields no fruit.
- It doesn’t seem to seek in.

In the second type of soil.....The seed falls on rocky ground where it did not have much soil but immediately the plant does sprout up.....

- But since it had no depth, when the sun rose it was scorched.
- And since it had no root, it withered away.

Could this be you?

- You make a push. You are going to be in God's Word. You have the greatest of intentions.

But being in God's Word causes difficulties.

- You don't understand it all the time. You struggle with it.
- You try to live the life you should; but now it results in more guilt and battle.
- Pastor, you think, it was tough for me to get into God's Word but now that I am in it, my life seems tougher than before.....
- Not to mention my family does not understand or want to allow for the time I spend in God's Word.
- You go forth for a while, but the seed has no roots to endure. and when tribulation or persecution arises, on account of the Word, you fall away.

The third type of soil.....in terms of actual garden experience, I can perhaps relate most to this.

- This is the seed that fell among thorns and the thorns (or weeds) grew up and choked out the good seed that had sprouted.

You turn to God's Word, even hoping to find a regular routine in it.

- Busyness gets in the way.
- One week away turns into 2 weeks, then turns into 3 weeks and pretty soon the fruit of the garden has been choked out by the weeds.
- Worldly ways seem so attractive. Being in God's Word causes you to miss out on other things.
- In the words of Jesus, the cares of the world and deceitfulness of riches causes you to turn away and be unfruitful.

And then there is the fourth type of soil.

- It is described this way in the parable.
- Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some 60, some 30

This is where we want to be, but it is not so easy to do.

- In fact, what are we to do?
- Our Old Testament reading for today, FROM GOD’S WORD, helps us with all this.

Isaiah chapter 55 verse 11.

- “So shall My Word be that goes out from My mouth, it shall not return to Me empty but it shall accomplish that for which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

You see, we can’t do it on our own.

- Left to our own devices and ways, we will be like the garden I described to you at the beginning of this message that British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge used to illustrate to the man the importance of educating children in religion.
- It is no different for adults than children.
- Left to our own devices, our garden will be a mess.

We must continually be in God’s Word.

- We disciples of Jesus are fruitful...but we live in a world where satan, persecutions, wealth and worry are everywhere.

The Bible does have gardens from beginning to end.

- Literally from the Garden of Eden through Gethsemane, through the place of Jesus’ tomb and resurrection to the heavenly garden.
- Jesus is the strong gardener who faithfully tends even to the smallest of seeds.
- In God’s Word we call and trust in the Holy Spirit who will give us the divine gift of understanding and faith.

And we need the encouragement and strength of one another that God also gives to us.

- Encouragement like I am attempting to give to you this morning as kindly and urgently as I can.
- Look at the banner behind me today. “That we may grow.” Let’s grow together.

We need God. We can not do this without Him.

- Jesus closed this parable with the words, “He who has ears, let him hear.”

I mentioned and asked each of us to take this message and parable personally.

- I close this message with the words of the Scripture of the Week posted outside the church office.

- Hosea chapter 10 verse 12.
- Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you.

Dear Christian fiends.....grow a garden.

- And God promises that in Him it will yield results. Results now and yields for all eternity.
- Amen.

(Please Stand) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Having heard the Word of God we now prepare our hearts and minds to confess the words of the Nicene Creed as found on page 158 in your hymnal.