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Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

MIRACLE GROW: A PICTURE OF THE POWER OF CHRIST'S WORD

Take a seed. Set it on the table. Observe it...nothing happens. You could continue to watch it an hour, a day, a month. Still nothing happens. Now plant that same seed in a quarter inch of moist soil. Apply some warm light. It sprouts! How does it know to do that? Have you ever considered what a miracle the germination of a seed is?

It's also a miracle when a person has faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus seems to sprout in a person's heart from out of nowhere. But there is something that causes faith to germinate in our hearts: Christ's Word. In the summer season gardeners nurture bigger foliage and better produce by adding a processed fertilizer to their water called Miracle Gro®. Christ's word is another kind of "Miracle Grow" (we'll spell it G-R-O-W). But there is an important difference. The Miracle Gro®, the physical fertilizer that gardeners use, only encourages the *growth* of plants. But from the very start Christ's Word causes the germination, the growth and even the fruits of person's faith in Jesus. So from Jesus' parable about the Sower and the Seed let's try to gain a new appreciation for the miraculous power of Christ's Word.

How fitting that in this parable you are I are the dirt! That's what we are. In fact, the Bible says God made Adam from the dust of the earth. God says dust you are and after you die to dust you will return. Dirt isn't able to do much on its own, certainly nothing spiritual. One thing dirt can do is become hardened. Picture the sower spreading the seed by hand. Jesus said, *When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.* At first glance we might think this applies to the unbeliever from whom everything bounces off. But there's more to this picture than that. The dirt on the path has become hardened. It can't receive the seed. Sow the seed, the message doesn't sink in.

Hmmm, doesn't sink in. Does that sound familiar at all? Sadly, we longtime Christians can be the worst ones. We get so used to the message that we no longer really hear it anymore. Do we also get so used to our sins so that the message of Christ's forgiveness loses its punch as well? Do you think your giddy reading of harsh comments beneath an online article or your longing for the life that an acquaintance presents on Facebook or the sheer hours idled uselessly away on social media will damn you any less than someone's online porn or gambling addiction? Go on thinking you're not guilty of the really serious sins and satan will keep snatching up the seed of Christ's Word from your heart. There'll be no Miracle Grow there.

Dirt can also be shallow. Jesus said, *What was sown on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.* At first glance we might picture that new Christian who becomes a church member but soon drifts away. But we're missing an important detail. Jesus said, *Since he has no root.* Are you and I satisfied with being Christians who have no root? We figure we know enough to get by. But there's no effort to grow any deeper or to ground ourselves more firmly. There's no cultivating the faith at home. But then when someone at work asks why your church puts down women, or someone at school remarks that Jesus never condemned homosexuality, or the History Channel features some lost book of the Bible, or someone asks why Lutherans baptize babies when Scripture doesn't give one example of a baby being baptized you're not sure how to respond. When a tragedy or some major life problem comes, you are at a loss for comfort or guidance or answers. Or worst of all is when old age creeps up and after a lifetime-squandered

without the Miracle Grow of Christ's Word your faith in Jesus has no root. You are empty. Your heart is a vacuum with nothing but uncertainty and the terrors of the grave to fill it.

Dirt can also be weedy. Jesus continued, *What was sown among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.* At first glance we might think of that 20-something who's only out for a good time and cares nothing about the serious stuff of life. But Jesus said the *worries* of this life and the *deceitfulness* of wealth choke it. But don't we all believe that if we just had a little more money our lives would be better? Don't we easily permit the news media to paralyze us with whatever happens to be the latest apocalyptic predictions? And the Miracle Grow of Christ's Word is choked in our hearts.

It's interesting that Jesus gives us four scenarios. And the first three, three out of four, feature bad soil. Does that tell us something about Jesus' assessment of the human race spiritually? But now, now comes the good soil. Now Jesus says, *But what was sown on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it.* Ahh, and that's what we want to be is good soil, right? But dirt isn't inherently good. Dirt is dirt. What makes it good soil is that it has to be broken up. It needs to be turned over, the weeds pulled, the rocks pulverized, everything all dug up. After it's been beaten up for a while, then we call it good. But all we really mean is that it's finally ready for planting.

If you saw yourself in any of the previous scenarios, if you felt a twinge of discomfort at those descriptions, then recognize that the Holy Spirit is plowing the ground in your heart right now. Jesus is calling you to repentance. Therefore, listen to His calling and do repent. Repent of your hardening heart, or the shallowness of your faith, or your fear-stricken faithlessness. These are not the ways Christ wants you to continue.

But don't think you can just up and decide to have a change of heart either. No matter how determined you are the same worries are going to haunt you. You'll still go back to minimizing your sins. You'll still get sluggish about your faith. Even plowed dirt is still just dirt. There is no power of salvation in your heart.

Salvation is found only in the Sower. He is the one with the true spiritual power of Miracle Grow. Thus the Sower, Christ, sows His seed in us and the real miracle happens. Christ's seed is the good news that no matter how much our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts. It is the good news that since Christ knew all along that our hearts will always go the wrong way, Christ became the way, the truth, and the life for us. He suffered and died on the cross to pay the penalty for our wayward hearts and for our entire sinful selves. Because of Jesus' sufferings and death on the cross, God forgives all sin inside and out, even washes away the most impenetrable layers of grime, the fears, and secrets buried deepest in you. Christ didn't shy away from the dirt. He was buried in the dirt, in a tomb. But three days later He came back to life and came out of the dirt to live and rule in glory forever. He did this so that the Miracle Grow of His Word would spring up new, eternal life within you.

Did you notice how careless the sower in Jesus' parable was? Throwing seed wherever, regardless of the condition of the soil? God is just that generous in sowing His forgiveness on you. Regardless of your condition He sowed forgiveness on you when you were baptized. Regardless of your condition when you walk in here on a Sunday morning he throws His forgiveness out on you through Word and Sacrament. So generous, so eager is He to forgive you. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, that Word of forgiveness lands in your heart, takes root and saves you. That is the great miracle.

The power of Christ's Word is truly a miracle to be treasured. That and that alone germinated your faith in Jesus. And now, because of Jesus you may start living and doing things, not out of fear or secrecy or ignorance - but out of faith. How you live, what you do, what you're interested in sprouts from the fact that you trust Jesus has saved your life. And you, a simple piece of soil, produce a magnificent crop 30, 60 or even 100 times what was sown. You, dust from dust, become a fruit-laden, living tree that will one day be transplanted to the everlasting Eden of heaven.

May the Holy Spirit always cause us to marvel at this miracle, the Miracle Grow, the miraculous power of Christ's Word.