



證道

Sermon

好土結果百倍

A Hundredfold Harvest from Good Soil

A Hundredfold Harvest from Good Soil

好土結果百倍

馬太福音 Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The Same News, Different Responses

During one of my on-call shifts, I received a call from the Emergency Department. They told me that a patient had arrived without a heartbeat and was being resuscitated, while several family members were wailing and crying in the family room.

The Same News, Different Responses

They needed me to come and support them. It was not the first time I had received a call like this, nor was it my first time caring for a family in a life-or-death situation.

Still, I could not help feeling nervous for the patient who was being resuscitated.



The Same News, Different Responses

When I arrived and learned more about the situation, I found the family member exactly as the nurse had described her. ~~her face was covered with tears, her hands were clasped together, her whole body was trembling, and between gasping breaths, she cried out loudly, begging God for mercy.~~

The Same News, Different Responses

About 20 minutes later, perhaps because she was physically and emotionally exhausted, she began talking about ~~it~~ how much the patient had already suffered. Slowly, her prayer began to change:

If God was going to take him now, then please do not let him suffer any longer.

The Same News, Different Responses

During that time, I went to the Emergency Department several times to check on ~~the resuscitation~~. A physician, looking both exhausted and proud, told me, “We got him back! He is stable now!”

The Same News, Different Responses

The doctor and I returned to the family, and I watched as the woman, her face ~~still covered with tears~~, but this time smiled and kept saying, “Thank you, Lord.”

The Same News, Different Responses

Everything about her response made perfect sense. Yet within that single hour, I witnessed how the same situation ~~could~~ affect the same person in very different ways.

The Same News, Different Responses

Today, through this story from the Emergency Department, I want us to reflect on how we understand Jesus ~~■ Parable of the Sower, the four kinds of soil, and their relationship to our own~~ lives.

Are We Really Good Soil?

By Matthew 13, Jesus had already become a household name. Large crowds followed and wanted to hear him teach. There were so many people that Jesus had to sit in a boat and speak to the crowd along the shore.



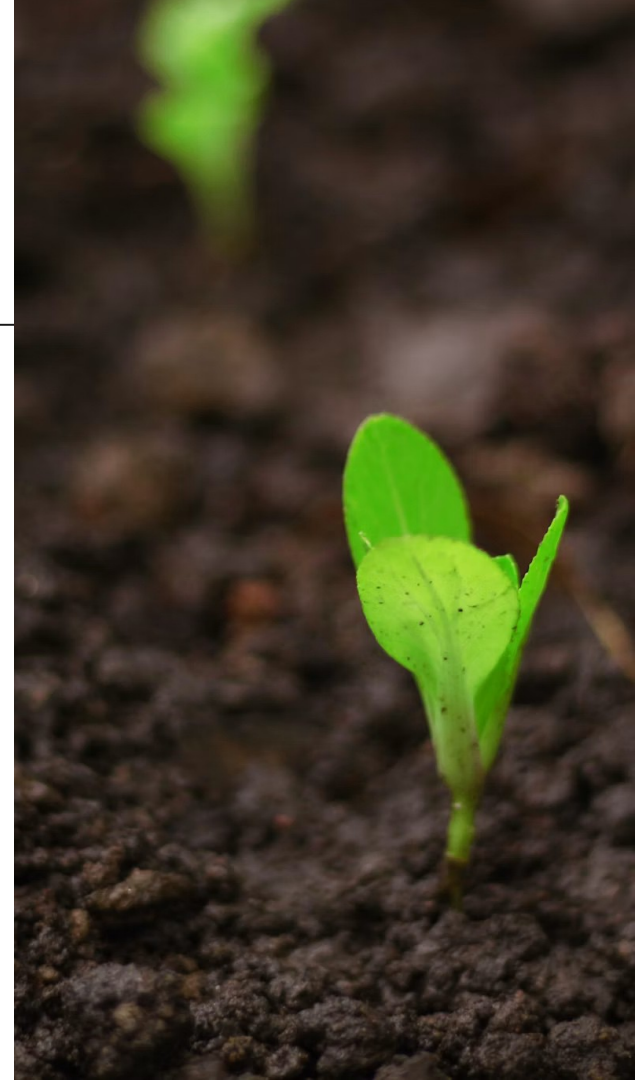
Are We Really Good Soil?

Knowing that so many people had come to listen, Jesus used the image of sowing seeds as a metaphor for his teaching, and different kinds of soil to illustrate the different ways people responded to what they heard and the different results that followed.



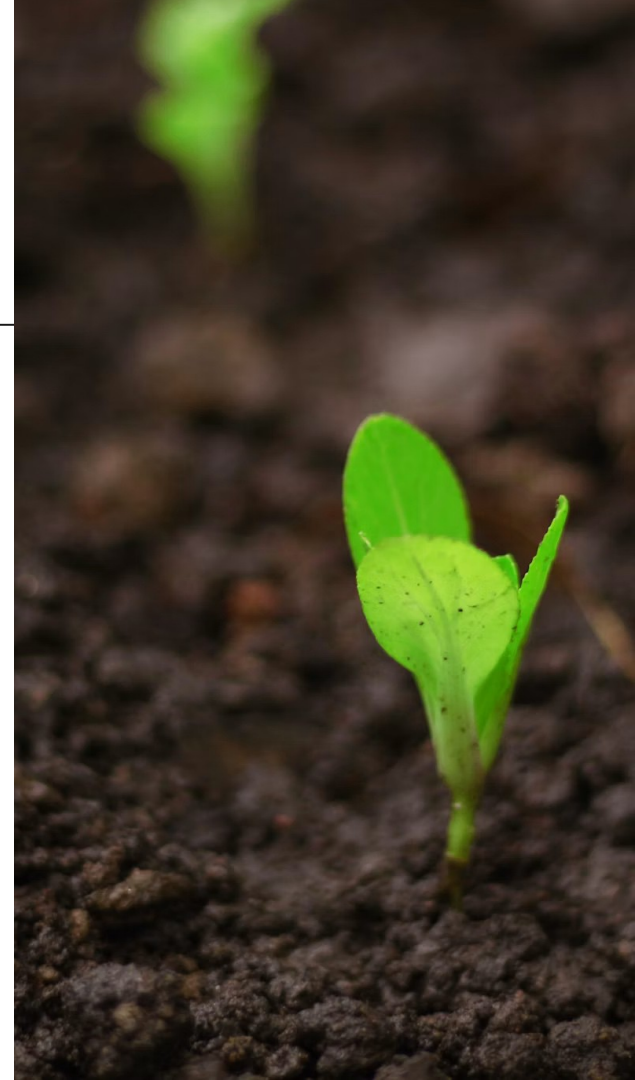
Are We Really Good Soil?

Because of this context, it is easy for us to simplify the message like this: ~~there are four kinds of people in the world, but only one kind can truly receive the message~~, allow it to take root in life, resist the distractions of the world, and finally bear fruit.



Are We Really Good Soil?

In other words, for the other three kinds of people, even receiving the gospel seems ~~to be~~ **in vain**.



Are We Really Good Soil?

But there is **a danger** in reading the parable this way.

We may assume ~~that because we have come to church every Sunday for decades, listened to sermons, and confessed with our mouths that Jesus Christ is Lord,~~ **we must certainly be good soil.** The truth is that our lives still encounter many challenges.

Are We Really Good Soil?

Sometimes, we still feel that our faith has little to do with our actual lives, or we ~~simply cannot take in what God is saying.~~

Are We Really Good Soil?

Sometimes, we are quickly moved by God's word, but lose our strength when hardship and disappointment come.

Are We Really Good Soil?

Sometimes, even though we have strong faith and attend church faithfully, our hearts ~~is become~~ so crowded with the anxieties and pursuits of life that there is no room left, and our faith slowly loses its ability to bear fruit.

Are We Really Good Soil?

Today, I want to invite us to read Jesus' Parable of the Sower through a different lens. Instead of sorting people into four categories of soil, let us imagine each person's life as a whole landscape.

Are We Really Good Soil?

Within that landscape there is good soil, thorny ground, shallow rocky soil, and, of course, hard paths unsuitable for cultivation. Let us examine the landscape of our own lives and both celebrate and reflect upon the four different ways the gospel of God may be received and bear—or fail to bear—fruit within us.

One Life, Four Kinds of Soil

First, there is **the path**. This is probably the part of ourselves that none of us likes very much. The path has no loose soil to shelter the seed, so God's word cannot take root there at all.

One Life, Four Kinds of Soil

In our lives, most of us have certain places connected to our deepest wounds, ~~anger~~, or disappointment in faith.

One Life, Four Kinds of Soil

They may involve mistakes we made in the past, a failed marriage, a broken family, a dream we gave up, or a prayer ~~or we prayed for years that was never answered.~~

These experiences may leave us unwilling to let God touch those places again.

One Life, Four Kinds of Soil

Next comes the **rocky ground** with shallow soil. These are the places where our ~~faith~~ becomes discouraged when it is tested before it has had time to take root. Faith really did sprout there.

One Life, Four Kinds of Soil

We may once have sincerely believed, been deeply moved, and felt full of passion. ~~But when illness, failure, conflict, or a long~~ season of waiting actually arrived, we discovered that our faith did not yet have roots deep enough to sustain us through those difficulties

One Life, Four Kinds of Soil

As a result, faith still seemed powerless in the face of those struggles.

One Life, Four Kinds of Soil

Notice that neither the path nor the rocky ground in our lives has been abandoned by God.



In the parable, the sower still scatters seed upon both. God has never given up on these difficult places in our lives.

One Life, Four Kinds of Soil

Yet so often, we are the ones who say, “There is nothing we can do,” or “That is just the way it is.”

We may have developed our own solid explanations and excuses, turning the real problems into hard stones.

Then, even when God’s seed falls there, it has nowhere to take root.

One Life, Four Kinds of Soil

Then there is the thorny ground. The seed successfully sprouts and grows, but the ~~realities~~ **thorns** of life crowd in until faith can no longer bear fruit.

One Life, Four Kinds of Soil

We may believe sincerely, attend worship regularly, and serve actively, but work, ~~money~~, family, relationships, and anxiety about the future can fill every corner of our lives.

One Life, Four Kinds of Soil

God's word continues to grow, but it never seems to have enough room to bear fruit. ~~Instead, what grows most abundantly are our~~ worries and troubles.

One Life, Four Kinds of Soil

Finally, most of us also have some **good soil** in our lives. These are usually the stories we tell when “sharing our testimony.”

One Life, Four Kinds of Soil

These parts of life are not necessarily smooth or free from difficulty. There may still be challenges.

One Life, Four Kinds of Soil

But in these places, we allow God to work, listen carefully to what God is saying, and ~~allow our lives to be transformed.~~ Eventually, we see the gospel bearing fruit in our lives, and sometimes we joyfully share that fruit with others.

Good Soil Is Not Born That Way

This year, I started growing a few small houseplants at home. One time, I went with a friend to buy pots and soil, and that was when I discovered how complicated it could be just to grow one little plant. First of all, there were several different kinds of soil.

Good Soil Is Not Born That Way

Then I discovered that even getting a plant to stand up straight in the soil was surprisingly difficult. 

Pruning, watering, sunlight—every single thing required research, because I was afraid that one wrong move would kill my plants.

Good Soil Is Not Born That Way

Even though I covered the table with newspapers before I started, soil still ended up all over the floor. 

And worse, a few days later, I discovered that the brand-new soil I had bought was starting to grow mold.

Good Soil Is Not Born That Way

That experience made me think: our lives really are like growing plants. You cannot simply buy good soil, stick a plant into it, and assume that you never have to do anything again. Soil needs care. It needs tending. Only then can the plant continue to grow. In other words, good soil is not something we are simply born with.

Good Soil Is Not Born That Way

Good soil is a life that remains willing to be turned and tended by God. So now, I want to suggest three practices for tending the thorny ground, rocky soil, and even the hardened paths within our lives, so that the seeds God scatters within us do not keep coming to nothing.

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

First, we need to turn the soil. We need to begin by acknowledging that there are places in our lives that we do not want our faith to touch.

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

Let us courageously look at the ground that has been trampled
hard, face our deepest wounds, and honestly name our real
emotions.

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

This week, during your devotional time, I invite you not to rush to solve the problem. Simply spend some time ~~with those emotions and acknowledge that this part of your life really exists.~~

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

We do not need to—and probably do not have the ability to—change every difficult situation immediately. But ~~when we are ready, we can speak with someone we trust.~~

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

It may be a spiritual companion or a pastor. Or, in prayer, we can honestly confess our weakness before ~~God~~ and ask God to turn again the soil that has been closed off for far too long.

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

Second, we need to take root. We need to acknowledge that sometimes our faith is full of emotion and inspiration but has not yet grown deep enough to withstand the wind and the scorching sun of life.

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

Let us look back and ask whether we have ever made many commitments during seasons of spiritual passion, only to return to where we started when difficulties came.

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

This week, I invite you to choose one small but sustainable spiritual practice.

It may be ten minutes of prayer each day, reading a short passage of Scripture regularly, or, when anxiety or conflict arises, pausing before you respond and offering one honest prayer to God.

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

We do not need to prove our faith through temporary enthusiasm. Instead, day after day, we can allow God's word to enter more deeply into our lives, so that our faith can grow downward before the storms arrive.

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

Third, we need to prune.



We need to acknowledge that some things in our lives may not be bad in themselves, yet they have taken up too much space.

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

Work, money, family, relationships, responsibilities, and even service in the church can quietly grow into thorns.

We become so busy trying to maintain everything that we no longer have room simply to live.

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

This week, I invite you to ask yourself: What is consuming too much of my attention right now?
Then try pruning ~~just one~~ small branch. Do one less unnecessary thing. _____

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

Spend a little less time repeatedly worrying about something you cannot control. Or intentionally set aside some quiet time, allowing God room to prune.

Sometimes, when we are willing to let go of even a little, God's word once again has room to grow and bear fruit.

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

When I think of the family member I accompanied in the Emergency Department, I believe that **our lives** really do ~~shape the way we receive a message.~~

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

An hour earlier, she could not imagine losing someone she loved. But through waiting, crying, remembering, and ~~being~~ accompanied, her heart slowly began to make room for a possibility that, while death was still near and still deeply painful, was no longer completely unbearable.

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

I also believe that faith bore fruit in her life through that experience—not because the patient was miraculously ~~brought back to life~~, but because she was willing to let her deepest fear be touched by God, allowing God to turn the soil, deepen the roots, and prune what needed to be pruned.

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

I believe the same is true of our faith. Just because there are words we cannot receive today does not mean we ~~will never be able to receive them.~~
Just because some places remain hard today does not mean God has abandoned that ground.

Turn the Soil, Take Root, and Prune

May we give God some room, and give ourselves some time, so that our lives may be turned, our faith may slowly take root, and the branches that crowd our lives may be pruned. And perhaps one day, God's word will bear fruit in our lives beyond anything we can now imagine.

Prayer

God who generously sows, we thank you for seeing the whole landscape of our lives.

You know the places that are closed, the places that are fragile, the places crowded by anxiety, and the places already bearing fruit.

Prayer

Give us the courage to let you turn the soil we would rather leave untouched.



Give us patience to let faith take root through small and faithful practices each day.

Give us wisdom to prune away what has occupied too much space in our lives.

Prayer

When we cannot hear you today, keep speaking to us.



When we cannot yet change, continue your patient work within us.

Prayer

Teach us to trust that you have abandoned no part of the soil, and let your word grow within us and bear fruit beyond anything we can imagine.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.