

SOW WHAT?

Sermon, July 30, 2017

Texts: Luke 8:4-15; Galatians 6:7-10

I like the story of a young reporter interviewing the successful businessman, asking the secret of his success. The tycoon responded, *"Two words."*

The reporter asked, *"What are those two words?"*

The tight-lipped tycoon replied, *"Right decisions."*

"And how," said the reporter, *"do you make right decisions?"*

"One word," replied the successful person, *"Experience."*

The reporter then asked, *"Well then, how do you get that experience to make right decisions?"*

Came the reply: *"Two words. Wrong decisions."*

This was a man who didn't get defeated by failure; he learned and even profited from it. I have been a pastor long enough to know that in just about every life here there are, or have been, failures, wrong decisions, that continue to haunt. I might also add that if you *haven't* known failure in any area of life, then shame on you! That probably means you have been much too careful with your life. Anyone who is attempting to live life well, to live life to its fullest, will spend time on the edges ... and one can't get out on the edge, where risk is taken and faith exercised, without occasionally failing. The question is, how do we handle failure? Do we quit? Do we get defeated by failure? Or, do we learn from failure how to be and/or do better, and then press on?

We took a brief look at the parable of the sower two weeks ago, a sermon I sort of edited 'way down on the spot due to time constraints, so I opted to come back to it this morning. The parable is found in Matthew, Mark and Luke; we looked at Matthew's account last time. Three quick points I made in that shortened sermon: **FIRST:** if we don't sow, we won't reap. If we don't take advantage of the opportunities we have to do our sowing work, to do good, we are never going to see the fruit of our labors because our labors didn't exist in the first place! **SECOND:** if we do sow, **there will always be some failure** ... and we need to be prepared for that. Remember the odds for success in the parable. Three out of four times (*that's 75% of the time!*) our seed-sowing will result in little or no growth! But some of our efforts *will* fall on good soil! Don't quit. **THIRD:** if we faithfully keep on sowing, though, we will eventually succeed! We will see a harvest; a harvest, by the way, that will come back to feed you as well as others!

In this familiar parable, a farmer goes out to sow seeds, and *"... some fell along the path, it was trampled on, and the birds came and ate it up."* In Palestine the fields were typically in long narrow strips, and the ground between the strips was used as a common path ... therefore this area was beaten as hard as pavement by the feet of those passing by. That's the area "along the path." Jesus went on to explain that some people are like the hard path; for whatever reasons, they are too hardened or too calloused or too dense ... or too trampled upon ... to receive the "seed" of God's word. The "seed" just sort of bounces off them, like rain on a tin roof; they will hear and see and understand and/or care little or nothing about spiritual things.

Jesus continues, *"Some fell on rock (or, rocky places, as Matthew elaborates, where there was not much soil), and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture."* The seed that fell here would quickly germinate, but the ground was just too rocky for the seed to take root and flourish for long, the soil was too shallow and lacked moisture. Jesus intimates some people receive the Word of God with joy, it does take root, it grows quickly, but, when the "heat" comes in the time of testing, their faith just withers away. I'm sure just about every one of us can make a fairly long list of people we have known who arrived at a new found faith and were just filled with enthusiasm about it. But in spite of your best efforts, or the church's best efforts, within weeks or months they sort of fade away, unable to put down deep spiritual roots. Their lives are just too "rocky" (*or they think their lives are too rocky*), so in times of testing, when the rubber meets the road in discipleship duties, they wither.

Jesus continues, *"Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants." ... "The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches*

and pleasures, and do not mature." The worries of this life, and/or the pursuit of wealth or security starts to take priority over their life of faith and soon chokes the life out of their faith. Finally, "*Still other seed fell on good soil, it came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.*" Jesus goes on to explain, "*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 a hundred times more than was sown..*" The question normally asked at this point is, "*What kind of soil are you?*"

That's a good question, but as I mentioned two weeks ago, I prefer to take a slightly different tack and focus our attention on Farmer Sow and Sow, because we are called by God to go out and do our "sowing" work of spreading heavenly "seeds" for the kingdom. What we are called to scatter around out there by our word and deed and action is our God-affected lives. What we are called to scatter about by word and deed is our influence on others, on our families, on those with whom we work, all for the kingdom of God. I believe one reason Jesus tells this parable is to encourage His disciples to persevere in the good work of sowing. And I highlighted two verses from Paul; one which we read earlier, "*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the household of believers.*" And the second, Ephesians 2:10 -- "*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*"

Personally, I believe these two verses get right to the root of it all. According to Paul, this is why God created and redeemed and liberated and freed us. This is what it's all about! This is what we should spend our energies and our time and our resources doing. This is what we are created for in Christ Jesus. We are to DO ... not just think about, talk about, theologize about, we are to DO ... good works! We are to take every opportunity to do good, and especially to those who belong to the family of faith; we are to go out and find those opportunities and good works that God has already prepared for us to do. God has prepared something special for each and every one of us to do, and He has gifted us accordingly ... so we need to get out there, find the God-prepared opportunities, and *do* them! To be sure, we are not *saved* by good works; Paul is crystal clear about that. It is by grace we are saved, through faith ... and this is not from ourselves, it is solely the gift of God's grace to us. We've done nothing to earn that grace; it is a gift. But that does not negate the crucial importance of good works. After all, according to Paul, this is WHY God sent His Son, this is why we are saved, this is why we are restored, this is why we are redeemed, this is why we are forgiven, this is why we are freed and this is why we are equipped ... *to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do.*

"*A man reaps what he sows,*" wrote Paul. "*The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*" If we go on sowing to the sinful nature, sowing wild oats, if we keep on seeding and watering and feeding those wild oats, nursing and indulging that sinful nature, guess what will result? Destruction. Damaged lives. Ruined relationships. But if we go on sowing to the Spirit, we will reap life. Every time we consciously choose to do what we know to be good good, to do good works, to say good things, to do that which we know is pleasing to God, we *sow good seeds*, we sow *to* the spiritual nature.

The same Paul who wrote to the church in Galatia also wrote to the church in Philippi, "*Finally, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable -- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy -- think about such things.*" I've mentioned this before, but note that Paul did NOT write: "*Whatever is false, whatever is dishonorable, whatever is wrong, whatever is impure, whatever is ugly, whatever is disreputable, if anything is immoral or contemptible, try to avoid thinking about such things.*" No, Paul's thrust is positive, proactive: whatever is "excellent or praiseworthy" ... think about and keep on doing such things! Choose to focus our energies on what is good, encourage what is good, talk about what is good, promote good, and keep on doing good as much and as often as we have opportunity! And just stay away from the things that make it difficult to think about and do what is noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable ... which is about 85% of television programming these days, but that's another sermon.

Focus on what is good. Encourage what is good. Work hard to produce, feed, encourage, grow AND DO what is good. Praise and encourage and cultivate what is good in others. Next to helping others come to know the grace of Jesus Christ, perhaps the most vital duty of the church is to encourage and promote and teach AND DO what is good, upright and pleasing to God.

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."