

The Message for May 6, 2012**Luke 8:4-8, 11-15***Seeds***The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller**

Did you hear the one about a woman who had a hearing problem?

One day she and her husband were driving from Memphis, Tennessee to Little Rock, Arkansas. They were pulled over by a state trooper who asked if the husband knew how fast he was driving. The wife asked, "What did he say?" The husband replied, "HE ASKED IF I KNEW THAT I WAS SPEEDING." Looking at the driver's license the trooper said, "I see you're not from around here." The husband said, "No we are from Memphis." The wife asked, "What did you say?" The husband told her, "I SAID WE ARE FROM MEMPHIS." The state trooper then commented, "You know, the meanest woman I ever met was from Memphis." The wife asked, "What did he say?" The husband replied, "HE SAYS HE THINKS HE KNOWS YOU!"

How is *your* hearing? Personally I do have a hearing problem. I suffer from selective listening. Just ask my wife. I hear what I want to hear. I'm told that many men suffer the same problem – married men that is.

Two men were talking one day. One said to the other, "My wife talks to herself a lot." His friend said, "Mine does, too, but she doesn't know it. She thinks I'm listening."

President Franklin D. Roosevelt got tired of smiling that big smile all the time and saying the usual polite things at the White House receptions. So, one evening he decided to find out if anybody was paying attention to what he was saying. As each person came up to shake his hand, he flashed that big smile and said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." People automatically responded with comments such as "How lovely!" or "Just continue with your great work!" Nobody really listened to what he was saying, except one foreign diplomat. When the president smiled and said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning," the diplomat responded softly, "I'm sure she had it coming to her."

I share these stories to talk about our hearing the Word of God. I wonder if we all suffer from selective listening when it comes to the Word of God. Jesus told parables (stories) so people would remember what he said and perhaps "get it." Perhaps people would get his message and live differently as they recall and retell his stories.

Today we hear Jesus tells a parable about seeds and four kinds of soil. He explains the story to his disciples. He says the seed is the Word of God and the four soils are the four ways people receive and respond to the Word of God. If we dig a little deeper this story really isn't about hearing or selective listening. It's about doing... It's about obeying... It's about producing good fruit from the good seed planted in us... It's about producing faithful disciples...

Growing up we used to play this game called, “Simon says.” Most of us have played that game – right? Unless you are really young because there is no app for it. “Simon says” is a follow-the-leader game. You know it works. “Simon says, pat your head.” So you pat your head because the leader said the right words and so you do it. It was a simple game. It’s weird though how we play that game in the church a little differently. In the church if Jesus says something, we don’t do it, we memorize it.

We memorize the books of the Bible, or key Bible verses. And some people can quote a Bible verse in any situation. We memorize the Lord’s Prayer, the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments & Luther’s explanations. We want our youth to graduate Confirmation so we insist that they do the memorization. But that doesn’t make any sense. A lot of the things we do in the church don’t make any sense.

Have you noticed that Jesus doesn’t say memorize this or memorize that. He doesn’t say memorize these stories that I tell you. He says, “Go and live them. Go and make disciples.” I wonder how many churches are doing what Jesus tells us to do. I wonder how many churches have made it difficult and memorized what Jesus said.

You know it’s funny, when I say to my son, “Simon, go clean your room,” he doesn’t go to his room, shut the door, and then come out an hour later and say to me, “Dad, I memorized what you said. You said, ‘Simon, go clean your room.’” He would never do that. And he would never say to me, “Dad, a few of my friends are going to come over and we are going do a book study on what it would look like if I cleaned my room.” He knows better than that.

Some day we will find ourselves standing before our Almighty Father and be asked what did you do with “the room” that I gave you to live in?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, children of God, I am convinced that church isn’t about memorization it’s about motivation. It’s about growing and producing disciples of Jesus. It’s about living by faith and not fear.

I believe Jesus told this parable about seeds and soil to motivate people to listen and do God’s will, to clean up our personal rooms, to clean up the sin in our lives. And live by faith in what Jesus says.

So let’s take a look at the four ways people tend to respond to God’s Word – God’s will – God’s seed.

First, the seed. The seed is God’s love and grace wrapped in this seed (hold up the Bible) -- God’s Word. Jesus has made that love and grace available to you and to me and to all peoples. Seeds have a power within them to bring forth life and produce. Nobody knows how a seed works. Scientists can take amino acids and DNA and produce a seed. They can plant it in the ground and it will not grow. But the seeds God makes when planted grow. We know that seeds need soil to grow in and produce.

So here are the four types of soil – the four types of people and how they respond to the seed of God’s Word in their lives. Jesus says:

1. **Path people** – have hardened hearts. They are never satisfied. They think the world owes them because they’ve been trampled down by the challenges and struggles of life. Path people I call the “Negative Nellies” and “Nasty Nates.” They are not fun to be around. God’s Word cannot penetrate the hardness of their hearts no matter what.
2. **Rocky people** – yearn for something more. They are looking to be satisfied because they’ve been burnt in the past. A relationship or an experience in the church or with another Christian didn’t go well and they got hurt. Rocky people I call the “Protective Pams” and “Private Peters.” They’ve been scarred by life and looking for more. They get enthusiastic and excited about God’s Word like a cold drink on a hot day but once satisfied they move on. The Word wears off quickly in their hearts.
3. **Thorny people** – place more trust in their riches and pleasures than they do in Jesus and God’s word. They think they are satisfied because of all they have but not really. They worry about their stuff more than they do about their salvation. These are called the “Wealthy Wilmas” and “Rich Rickys” who live for material and worldly things. God’s Word gets choked out of their lives because of their stuff.
4. **Good soil people** – need God in their lives. They live by the grace of God knowing that without God they are nothing. They are satisfied because they know that God doesn’t call the qualified God qualifies the called. They get it and they strive to live it. They know how easy it is to fall from God’s grace and so they give thanks to God everyday for the blessings in their lives.

Good soil people naturally produce the good fruit of... “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal 5:22). And they naturally share these good fruits with others as the word grows and produces through them.

I call these the “Persistent Pollys” and “Patience Pauls” in the world.

- Good soil people don’t focus on the other soils... but are willing to help others produce.
- Good soil people don’t focus on where the seed is or isn’t planted... but they are willing to help others see the seed within them.
- Good soil people don’t focus on anything except growing in God’s word and doing God’s will.

What kind of soil are you? No, no, no. I’m sorry that’s the wrong question. What kind of soil would Jesus say you are? Truth is depending on the situation we may act like any one these soils.

Sometimes our hearts are hardened and we act like the “Negative Nellies” and “Nasty Nates.”

Sometimes we are the rocky soil with a bad experience in the church or from another Christian and we act like the “Protective Pams” and “Private Peters.”

Sometimes we produce nothing but weeds because of all the riches in our lives choke us and we act like the “Wealthy Wilmas” and “Rich Rickys”

And sometimes by the grace and goodness of God we are good soil – we are the “Persistent Polly” and “Patience Pauls” in the world living by faith.

The seed of God’s Word has been planted here today, now what? Now what are you going to do? No, no, no. I’m sorry, that’s the wrong question. What are you going to be? That is the question. Amen.