



GROW. PRAY. STUDY.

Lord of Life Lutheran Church

September 30, 2018 – *How Will You Measure Your Life? By Who and How You Love*

Scripture: Matthew 13:1-9

Jesus said many things to them in parables: “A farmer went out to scatter seed. As he was scattering seed, some fell on the path, and birds came and ate it. Other seed fell on rocky ground where the soil was shallow. They sprouted immediately because the soil wasn’t deep. But when the sun came up, it scorched the plants, and they dried up because they had no roots. Other seed fell among thorny plants. The thorny plants grew and choked them. Other seed fell on good soil and bore fruit, in one case a yield of one hundred to one, in another case a yield of sixty to one, and in another case a yield of thirty to one. Everyone who has ears should pay attention.”

The soil made the difference

MONDAY 11.3.14 Matthew 13:3-9

Farming, like fishing, was a common occupation in Galilee. (Matthew said Jesus sat in a fishing boat by the shore to tell this story—cf. Matthew 13:2). At least one farmer was likely in plain view sowing seed by hand as Jesus told his story. Even today, some seed grows, some doesn’t. That was even truer in hand-tilled fields, with the seed thrown out by hand. It was the same seed—the soil made the difference.

- What person or persons played the biggest role in planting the seed of God’s message in your life? Is there anything you wish they had done differently in the planting process, as you look back? What are the main ways that your gifts, talents and temperament equip you to “sow the seed” into other lives?
- Jesus was a master at taking the ordinary activities of everyday people—fishermen, farmers, even parents and children—and using them to teach big ideas about his kingdom, his grace and forgiveness. How easy or hard do you find it to share God’s message without using “church talk” that may not seem to have much to do with “real life”? How can Jesus’ model help you learn to connect God with people’s day-to-day concerns?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you said, “A farmer went out to scatter seed.” Your story never hinted that the farmer got depressed and quit. Help me to keep my “sack of seeds” at hand, always ready to scatter the story of your love into the lives of others. Amen.

What kind of soil are you?

TUESDAY 11.4.14 Matthew 13:18-23

If you didn’t already know, you surely at least suspected that Jesus’ story about sowing seed wasn’t mainly about farming. When his disciples asked him about the story’s meaning, Jesus made it plain to

them (and us) that the different soils actually described different kinds of

people and experiences. The central issue he wanted each person to consider was, “How open is your deepest self to God’s message?”

- What kind of soil are you? How are you responding to God’s message in your life? Scholar N. T. Wright said, “This takes time, and sometimes hard work. A quick glance at the Bible, an occasional sitting in church or a study group and being entertained by some new idea, is probably not enough. Care and thought needs to be put into the task of hearing the word of the kingdom until it has taken proper root.” Click [here](#) for a list of ideas of ways to deepen the roots of your faith.
- Jesus also outlined, in verses 19-22, three factors that can make the “soil” of our spirit barren, and keep us from responding to Jesus’ love. Which of the three issues Jesus identified has posed the biggest challenge to you in being a Christ-follower? In what ways have you and God already overcome some of those challenges? Which one or two remain the greatest area for your future “cultivation”?

Prayer: Loving God, I want to be receptive, to have the “seed” of your kingdom growing strongly and bountifully in my heart. Guide and help me in cultivating the “soil” of my heart to always be receptive to your word to me. Amen.

Jesus’ forerunner: “Bear fruit!”

WEDNESDAY 11.5.14 Matthew 3:1-10

The desert of Judea is harsh and bleak. The people who created the famous Dead Sea Scrolls lived in a part of this desert, near the coast of the Dead Sea. The blunt prophet John, Jesus’ forerunner, came from this rugged land. He heralded the Messiah’s nearness, and because he baptized those who repented, he became known as John the Baptist.

- In verse 2, the phrase “Change your hearts and lives” translates the single Greek word *metanoiētei*. It’s often translated just “repent,” but the *Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew* noted that the word “does not mean simply ‘to be sorry about’ or ‘to regret,’ but rather involves a change of both attitude (or heart) and of conduct.” In what ways has a change of attitude or heart showed itself in changed conduct in your life?
- In verses 9-10, John challenged those who thought their ethnic or religious heritage alone could make them close to God. Have you ever known (or been) someone who hoped that family tradition or church affiliation could take the place of a living, life-

changing personal connection with God? Do religious as well as non-religious people need to hear and heed John's call to repent?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as I consider living as you call me to live, making the changes that might involve, I feel some fear. But I feel excitement stirring, too! Give me the boldness of John to step into the adventure you began 2000 years ago. Amen.

The fruit of loving your neighbor

THURSDAY 11.6.14 James 2:8-17

During his life on earth, Jesus was often censured for showing mercy (e.g. Luke 5:30, Luke 15:2). Jesus' brother James saw that same merciless spirit showing up in some early Christian churches. The lack of love produced both judgment toward others' weakness, and an unwillingness to actively help suffering, struggling people. James evoked his brother's teaching

in Matthew 7, saying our attitude and actions reveal our inner reality. In the end, in God's world, mercy triumphs over judgment.

- James called the command to love your neighbor as yourself (originally from Leviticus 19:18) a "royal law." When has mercy had to overrule judgment in order for you to live up to that law, and love particular, perhaps hard-to-love people as your neighbor? In what ways does relating to others with mercy rather than condemnation create greater freedom for you? For them?
- James didn't describe a good "balance" between faith and works, as though we need a 50/50 mix of the two. We need 100% of both—our actions grow out of our faith, as a grateful response to God's gracious acceptance of us. What are some of the actions, the works, which you have seen grow in your life as you respond to God's grace?

Prayer: Lord, when I'm honest with myself, I know I need your mercy and grace. When you call me to offer mercy and grace to people I don't like or approve of, well, that's tougher. Keep growing a loving, merciful heart in me. Amen.

Loving our Lord

FRIDAY 11.7.14 Matthew 25:1-12

Jesus told a story, set in a multi-day Hebrew wedding, about ten bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom (Jesus) to arrive. Five of them brought extra lamp oil, were ready even though he arrived late, and went into the wedding. Five others were unprepared. But they weren't just missing oil—they'd missed a relationship. When they got back, the bridegroom hauntingly told the unprepared bridesmaids, "I don't know you."

- What spiritual lesson(s) can you learn from looking at the difference between the “wise” and the “foolish” characters in this story? With which group do you identify more? In what ways, day by day, are you deepening your personal bond with Jesus so that you know him, and he knows you?
- Jesus’ parable clearly showed that we cannot borrow some things, particularly relationships. Have you ever wished you could “borrow” the connection your pious grandmother or your preacher has with God? Doesn’t work. God wants a love relationship with you, and you only build that by relating to God yourself. In what ways, if any, are you trying to “ride someone else’s coattails” to God? How can you take ownership of that relationship for yourself?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for inviting me to be a part of your “wedding feast.” Help me to value that privilege highly, and to stay connected with you every day. Amen.

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you”

SATURDAY 11.8.14 John 15:1-8

In Jesus’ day, Israelites often pictured themselves as vines in a vineyard God tended (cf. Psalm 80:8-18, Isaiah 5:1-7). Jesus adapted and expanded that image. When his followers stayed united to him like branches to a vine, Jesus said, they would love each other as he loved them. This sermon series asks how you will measure your life. Jesus suggested that the answer is simple (but not easy): measure it the way God does. Produce fruit that brings glory to God.

- Scholar William Barclay said some of Jesus’ followers “are lovely fruit-bearing branches of himself; others are useless because they bear no fruit. Who was Jesus thinking of when he spoke of the fruitless branches? ... He was thinking of Christians whose Christianity consisted of profession without practice, words without deeds; he was thinking of Christians who were useless branches, all leaves and no fruit.” Spend some time in prayer today asking God to guide you in bearing fruit, perhaps in an area where your spiritual life to date has been mostly leaves.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, keep me connected to you today and every day. Let me be a channel through which your divine love can flow freely to bless the lives of other people around me. Amen.

Family Activity: As a family, talk about how you can bring hope, joy and comfort to others. Discuss each person’s unique gifts and abilities. How can those be used to serve those who are sad or lonely? How can those same gifts be combined with those of other family members to serve and help? Using construction paper, create the symbol of a heart. On it, write or draw the gifts of each person. Also write or draw about how they can be used to serve others. Pray together, asking God to help guide you to use your ideas and gifts. Thank God for giving them to you. Display your family’s “heart” as a reminder to share God’s love, and to measure your life by how well you love.

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