

We are going to grow  
Matthew 13  
July 27th, 2017

In 44 of the 50 states there a lottery called Powerball. Millions of people every week buy two dollar tickets trying to match their six numbers on the ticket to the 6 random numbers drawn twice a week. The odds in winning are one in 292 million and some change. The slogan for the company is "You can't win if you don't play." It obviously works. People keep buying the ticket every week. A whole lot of people play. But almost no one wins.

Our lesson for today is from Matthew chapter 13. And Jesus is not talking about winning the Powerball. But he is talking about receiving a treasure that is far greater. If you won the Powerball you might be set for life, you might be able to do whatever you want, but eventually that would all come to an end when you have to leave all of your wealth behind. The treasures of heaven never fade. They never disappear. And they are far greater than owning a yacht, or eating very small portions of beautiful looking food. Jesus wants to give heaven to people. He wants to be with him in paradise forever where wealth isn't an issue because you will have everything you want or need.

Jesus wants his listeners and you and me to have that. So he told this parable. There is a farmer who went out sowing seed. I picture a farmer with a big bag of seed in like a satchel. And he is walking on his property. Systematically spreading the seed by throwing it. And as he walks his property throwing the seed. The seed is the same, but where that seed lands changes. Jesus talks about the farmer throwing the seed onto four different places. Three of the places where the seed falls, it dies. One of the places where it falls, the seed grows.

Jesus tells us this story of a farmer throwing his seed and then to his disciples he explains what it means. He didn't just tell them a story to be entertaining, he wanted to teach the disciples a lesson. He wanted to teach them about what happens to peoples faith in this world. The disciples and the church have been tasked by Jesus to spread his word. To spread the seed of faith to the whole world. To tell the good news about Jesus to everyone. And it is easy to get discouraged when we do that.

When I read verses like our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 55 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so yah it yields seeds for the sower and bread for the eater, so my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. I get excited! I hope you do too. When it rains, plants get watered. When plants get watered and are in the sun and in soil they grow. You don't have to motivate a plant to grow. You don't have to convince it to grow. That is just the way it works. Water can't help but water things. God's word can't help but make faith grow.

That's exciting isn't it! God's word has the power to do all of this. If someone told you to make a potato, I think you would look at them in a very confused way and say what do you mean make a potato how do you make a potato? But they gave you a little planter and said there is a potato seed in this soil set it outside and water it every day. And in a few months you are going to have a whole bunch of potatoes we could say, "Hey I am going to make some potatoes." Which is a weird thing to say. But it can work if you just keep giving that plant what it needs. Soil, water, and sun. God tells you to grow your faith. God tells you to change hearts from people who by nature hate God to people who love God more than they love themselves. How in the world do we do that?

We want this church to grow don't we? We want to listen to the command of Jesus. We want to worship with more and more people every single week. We want to fill these pews with souls who know who their God is and love to praise him. And the question is how do we do that?

Powerball says you can't win if you don't play. Jesus is saying you can't have a crop if no one spreads that seed. He wants us to do that. And he doesn't want us to be discouraged. He doesn't want you to give up if you have sown a few seeds and you haven't seen the results that you wanted. He tells us what happens to the seeds that we spread.

"When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed that was sown along the path." That happens. We see it in church. Someone doesn't know much about Christianity. They have only heard a couple of things here and there. But they don't really understand it. Maybe they stopped into church because they were looking for guidance in their life, or they had a conversation with one of their friends, or they heard someone shouting messages on the strip, but they just weren't able to understand the message of the gospel. That God loves them. That God loves all people. The Jesus has died on the cross to save them from their sins. That the Bible is true and written for them. They might have listened to the message, but decided that this whole Christianity thing didn't fit into their world view. And since they couldn't wrap their mind around these things, Satan made them doubt and he destroyed any opportunity for faith that the person had. Some will reject your word. Some will reject the message of Jesus. That's what sin does.

"The seed falling on the rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time."

You have probably seen this too. People excited to hear about Jesus. They know the gospel. They know who their Savior is. They are excited. They are thirsty for the gospel. And then... they start to fade. You see them less often in Bible Class, you see them less often in worship. And then eventually you don't see them at all. Because they didn't have a root. They didn't keep digging in to God's word. They thought they were fine just doing the barely

enough, and it ended up not to be true. “When trouble and persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.”

This is why I can't stress enough how important Bible class is. And this church keeps encouraging everyone to go to Bible class or catechism or Sunday school over and over and over again. You know why we care so much about our catechism program that we have here. You know why we have a school that has chapel every day for all of the students. It's because we need to be rooted in God's word to stand up against the troubles and prosecutions of this world. Because they are there. And they won't stop coming at us. And we need to be ready. And that happens by us digging in deeper to God's Word. That's the only thing that will truly help. God's word, the knowledge and the comfort that you receive from the Bible, they are going to be far more valuable to you than anything else you will ever learn when tough times come. They are going to be far more valuable than any MVP trophy, more valuable than any sports highlight that you can talk about for years, better than any small talk conversation that you are going to have with your friends about the weather or your health, because God's Word will give you hope when nothing else can. That's why it matters to be rooted in Christ. It will give you comfort when nothing else matters. It is an eternal life and death issue. Saying I learned all that stuff if catechism a long time ago I'm good and I don't need to learn any more is recipe for hardship. What plant would say I don't want better roots. What Christian would say I don't want to know more about God and his love.

“The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.”

We see this too. People stray away from God using one of these two excuses. Things are too bad. I need to take a break from God for a while. Or things are so good that people think it won't matter if they take a break from God for a while. It's both. Good and bad things in our life can choke out our faith. That's what a weed does. It grows up strong and steals the sun and the nutrients away from the good plant. That's what things in this life do. They pull us away from God.

As we walk through all of these. You can probably think of people that you have seen go one of these ways. How some have strayed, or been pulled away by this life. But it's not just them out there. It's us in here too. We are in danger of falling into all of these traps. And we have fallen into them from time to time. We are in danger of not understanding something that God clearly teaches, so we start to turn from him. We are in danger of not getting our roots deep enough and having the persecutions or worries of life pull us away. We need to care for our faith, just like we would care for a young plant, water it, make sure it gets what it needs, by going to church, by attending Bible classes, by reading our Bibles

ourselves, by asking our Pastor's questions when we have them. Because we want to be the last plant.

"The seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word of God and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

I think we have some good soil here at GVELC. Resources? look at this worship facility, amazing. People? look around, these people are gifted and intelligent. Nourishment? We have the true word of God being taught every single week from the pulpit and we are dedicated to helping each other understand God's word. Teaching us no matter how many times we we stray from God. No matter what sin we have fallen into, you have a God who loves you and will never let you go. He is always there to give you love and forgiveness.

So how do we grow? We sow the seed. We invite people to come to our church. We talk highly about our church to others. We have conversations about what the Bible clearly teaches. We understand that sometimes the devil and this world are going to frustrate our efforts will not go the way that we hoped. But we don't give up. We keep telling more and more people and we keep inviting. And then we keep nourishing to faith of everyone who walks through these doors. We keep preaching the true word of God. We keep trusting that the same God who can turn a seed into a huge plant just using soil, water, and sunlight, can also turn a lost and condemned soul into a heir of eternal life using just the spoken word of God. That's amazing. That's a miracle. But it will never happen if we don't tell anyone. If we don't sow the seed. If we don't spread the word. We have to firmly root ourselves in God's word so that we can help others grow too. A dead plant doesn't produce more seeds. A dead faith does not produces more seeds. But a strong plant, who is being nurtured, is able to produce more and more and more.

The odds of our efforts working are not 1 in 292 million. They are much better. The reward for our efforts is not a few million dollars, its much more valuable, it is eternal salvation in heaven. But it takes some effort, and it takes faith that God will do what he promises to do. God help us trust him. God help us grow. Amen.