

The Dirt Allegory
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

This story is called the Parable of the Sower and the Seeds. But that's really wrong on two counts. First, this story isn't really about the sower or the seeds. It's really about the soil or the dirt the seeds fall in. Second, this story isn't really a parable. It's an allegory. Parables are stories that have a single point. The whole point of the story is to get one idea across. Parables are kind of like jokes—either you get it or you don't. If you have to explain a joke, then it isn't funny. If you have to explain a parable, it loses its power to make the point.

Allegories, on the other hand, are made to be explained. You're not supposed to understand an allegory until you have sat and thought about it, or until someone explains it to you. Allegories are full of symbolism, and you have to figure what the elements of the story symbolize.

Jesus explains this story to us. He tells us the sower of the seed is a Christian evangelist. The seed is the gospel. The soil are four kinds of people.

The story is really about the soils and the four kinds of people they symbolize. So, this story really should be called the Allegory of the Four Kinds of Soil, or maybe the Dirt Allegory. But that doesn't sound as nice as the Parable of the Sower and the Seeds, so I don't think the name will be changed anytime soon.

When you hear this story, you are supposed to ask, "What kind of dirt am I?" Which of these four kinds of people are you?

When people hear the gospel message of salvation and the coming Kingdom of God, they will respond in one of four ways:

Some will be like soil that has been walked on so much that it has become packed hard. A seed cannot take root in it. Some people's hearts have become so hardened by the things that have been done to them and by their choices and decisions that they can hear the good news that God loves them so much that God would even sacrifice his Beloved Son for them and it doesn't faze them. They could care less. There probably aren't any of those kind of people in here this morning. Unless they want to use the church for something, like to gain respectability, or to get a religious education for their children, or as a place to exercise power...there really isn't any reason for them to be in church.

Other people are like thin soil. When they hear the gospel, they are moved by it. They believe. But it makes no difference whatsoever in the way they live. They can tell you about the day they were saved. And they might have even tried living like a Christian for a little while. But it didn't last long. They soon went back to their old ways, content in the knowledge that even though they aren't saints, they have been saved. These people do come to church every now and then, if it's convenient and they are in the mood. Most Sunday mornings they are sleeping in, mowing their lawns, fishing, playing golf or soccer or softball, reading the Sunday morning paper, traveling, doing whatever they want to do, content in the knowledge that they have been saved, so they don't have to worry about learning more about the gospel or Christian living. When

they do come to church they usually don't come to a Methodist Church, because we talk too much about salvation being a process and that people can lose their salvation if they don't walk with Christ in faith and obedience. They don't like to hear that kind of talk. So, there probably aren't any of that kind of people here this morning.

Then there are the people who like soil which is deep and rich, but which isn't cared for. The seed takes root and sprouts and grows, but so do the weeds. The weeds steal the nutrients and the water and the sunshine the plant needs to produce fruit. I understand this kind of soil only too well. There is within me a frustrated gardener. I love the idea of having a garden. I remember the first time I planted a garden. I put it in the backyard of the parsonage. I had great ambitions of having a fine, large garden. One of the men in the church brought his tractor over and plowed it up for me. I planted all kinds of vegetables, and it wasn't long before they sprouted. The trouble was that I was going to school fulltime and pastoring three churches. You see, the thing about a garden is that you have to work it every day. Otherwise the weeds soon take over. A month or so after I planted the garden, the fellow who plowed it came over to take a look at my garden. I proudly took him out to the backyard. He looked around and said, "Where is it?" So, I took him through the garden and pulled back the weeds so that he could see the little plants growing. Needless to say, I didn't get much of a harvest out of that garden.

Some Christians are like that. The gospel has taken root in their hearts. They believe. They really want to live a Christian life. But their lives are so full of the demands of daily living that they don't have time to nurture their souls. They can make it to church more or less regularly. But there is no time for daily prayer or Bible study. They don't have the time to share the love of Christ with people, either through their words or their deeds. There is nothing special or different in their lives to cause people to be attracted to Christ or to live Christlike lives.

William Willimon tells about a conversation he had with a fellow professor. This professor had been working with a professor who was a Communist from Russia. The man asked Willimon if he had ever had close contact with a real Communist. Willimon said, "No, I never have. How was she different?" The man said, "That's just it. I couldn't tell any difference in her at all."

Does that describe us? When people describe us, would they say, "I believe they go to church. But, other than that, I can't tell any difference at all in the way they live?" If that's the case, then we are weedy soil.

Or are we the fertile soil? Some soil is deep and rich. It is well weeded. When a seed is planted in that kind of soil, it will produce a lot of vegetables. We should never get over the miracle of seeing one little seed become a large plant that produces enough food every day to feed several people.

We see the same thing with some people. Some people are so in love in Jesus that it shows in everything they say and do. Just being around these people is a religious experience. The Spirit of God is so alive and active in them that it reaches out and touches everyone who comes their way. They are not the least bit embarrassed to talk about how good God is or what a wonderful Savior Christ is. They can talk all day about prayers that have been answered. They can tell you about people whose lives are being changed right now by Christ. They leave a trail of people behind them who will tell you about the many kind and generous things they did for them.

What is the difference between the weedy soil and the fertile soil? It is a commitment to allow the sower to tend to the soil. Christ is the conscientious gardener who can turn our weedy soil into fertile soil. But we have to allow him to do it. We have to allow Christ to examine us daily and identify the fears, the doubts, the anger, and the resentments. We have to allow him to find the bad habits and destructive addictions, the pride, the ambition, the compulsion to control, the desire for praise.

Then we have to give him permission to weed our lives.

That's how we are different from soil. Soil can't say no to the gardener. We can. But if we say yes to Christ, he can transform us into rich, fertile soil, which produces a great harvest for the kingdom.

So, the question really isn't, What kind of soil are you? The question is, What kind of soil have you chosen to be?"

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