

TITLE: "Bearing Fruit with Patient Endurance"

TEXT: Luke 8:4-15 (NT p. 67)

⁴When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, [Jesus] said in a parable: ⁵"A [farmer] went out to [plant] his seed; and as he [planted], some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. ⁶Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. ⁷Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. ⁸Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold."

As [Jesus] said this, he called out, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

⁹Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant. ¹⁰[Jesus] said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that 'looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand.'

¹¹"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹²The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. ¹⁴As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. ¹⁵But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.

Introduction – purpose is to spread seed

The difference in flavor between a pinkish-white hothouse tomato with a taste like crisp cardboard and a perfectly ripe red tomato right off the vine bursting with flavor is amazing. You would hardly know they are the same fruit.

Good as ripe tomatoes are to eat, that is not their actual purpose. The purpose of the ripening process is for the tomato to actually get OVER ripe, burst, and spread it's seeds so that there will be MORE tomato plants.

Like a ripe tomato, the purpose for a Christian is NOT to be a nice ripe person that other people can enjoy. The PURPOSE for a Christian is to spread the seeds of faith to others so that more and more people become Christians.

This is NOT easy. I know it and the Lord knows it. And in the text this morning, Jesus describes 3 traps that Christians fall into that prevent them from spreading their faith in Jesus Christ. The Lord wants you to listen to this because you are responsible to either stay OUT of these traps to begin with or GET out of them if you are in them.

1. Sometimes birds eat up the seeds of faith

⁵“A [farmer] went out to [plant] his seed; and as he [planted], some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. ...¹²The [seeds] on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.”

This sounds like it is not the person's fault, because the devil took the seeds of faith away. Not so. The devil cannot take the word of God away unless the person allows him to do so. People who allow Satan to take away the word of God from their heart are not necessarily evil people. In fact, they can be quite nice. Their problem is their self-centeredness. People who refuse to accept the word of God want to be in charge of their own life and they do not want to get close to God because they do not want God telling them what to do.

Now we are ALL like that to some degree. At least I know I am. But those who CONSISTENTLY refuse to get closer to God, and get more and more ADAMANT about it as they get older, will get exactly what they want forever and ever, just as those who want to get closer to God will get what THEY want forever and ever. As C. S. Lewis writes: “In the end, there will be only two groups of people. Those TO whom God will say, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done.’”

Joan Vernon writes: “I was taking my elderly mother for a drive, and she'd scold me every time I went over the speed limit. Unfortunately I dismissed her advice and a state trooper pulled me over and issued a ticket. As my mother and I continued on our way, I complained that he should have let me off with a warning. ...” Joan,” she said, “I gave you a warning. HE gave you the ticket.”

I'm giving you a warning. You SHOULD come to worship God, you SHOULD pray, you SHOULD read and study God's word and you SHOULD help the poor and needy. Don't wait for God to give you a ticket that you have to pay. ...What kind of ticket does God give? God allows people to drift away from Jesus. When you start to drift away from Jesus, you start to lose the 9 fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness gentleness and self-control.

When I ask, "How are you doing," person after person tells me, "Busy." But then they tell me about all the TV they watch, how many sports their children are in and where they went last weekend. NOT gonna work folks! Each person was MADE to have a relationship with Jesus Christ and when you allow Satan to pluck away your seeds of faith, you will get less and less love, joy, peace and the rest of the fruit of the Spirit.

2. Sometimes testing causes the seeds of faith to fall away

"⁶Some [seeds] fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. ...¹³The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away."

I used to think, or at least to hope, that weddings and funerals would encourage people to start attending church. Hundreds of people have told me they were moved by the wedding or funeral service and promised to start coming to church. The number who actually have? ZERO. Why? They receive the word with joy at a wedding, or they receive the word of comfort at a funeral, but they have no root.

What is the root? In Isaiah 11:10 we read: "On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples...." Jesus is the Root. Without Jesus, even though the word of God is received with joy or with comfort, it will NOT last. Why? Because Satan will ALWAYS provide a time of testing or tempting that can cause a person to fall away.

This is true of Christians as well as non-Christians. Christians get tested and tempted just like everyone else. So why be a Christian? I Corinthians 10:13. There the Bible says: "God is faithful, and [God] will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it." If you stay close to God, God will give you what you need to withstand EVER test and temptation.

A woman in Connecticut used to attend church and bring her children to Sunday school. When the kids began to have sports practices and games on Sunday, it drew her away from attending. The kids are older now, but she never went back to church and her kids, even though they are good at sports, don't go to church either.

I know a woman who lost her adult daughter to cancer a couple years ago. The last few painful months of her daughter's life shook her faith to its core. But this woman turned to God for comfort and hope. She was tested with grief and tempted with despair, but God provided a way out so she could endure it. How? In prayer, the Lord assures her that her daughter is with him, she is happy and that she will see her daughter again and when she does, it will be forever.

God is faithful, and [God] will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

3. Some seeds of faith are choked by cares and riches and pleasures of life

“⁷Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. ...¹⁴As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.”

What are “the cares and riches and pleasures of life” that choke the word of God and keep a person's spiritual fruit from maturing? I believe it is different for each person.

There was a guy whose goal in retirement was to have a 5 handicap. I don't know why he wanted a 5. He was about a 10 handicap and he insisted that it was because he didn't get enough time to actually play golf while he was working. So when he retired, he dropped out of his church responsibilities and played golf every day. He even took lessons. The results? After six months, he was a twelve handicap. Even new custom clubs failed to do the trick. He was furious.

As we get older, we want FEWER responsibilities, not more.

As we get older we want to do the things that we couldn't afford earlier in life.

As we get older, we fewer commitments.

We MAY retire from our jobs, but we NEVER retire from our faith in Jesus Christ.

WE may want to retire to what WE want to do.

JESUS wants us to retire so we can do what HE wants us to do.

Now I know I will hear sometime soon that Pastor Dave is saying that you can't have interests and hobbies. No. It is OK to have them but it is NOT OK to allow them to interfere with your commitment to the Lord and God's work. And the test is up to you no matter what your age. If you are doing something and are getting less and less satisfaction from it, maybe God is trying to get your attention.

Conclusion - Some seeds of faith fall on good soil

⁸Some [seeds] fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold....¹⁵But as for [the seeds that fell] in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance."

There are people in your life right now, or there are people you could get to know if you took the time to do so, people who NEED your faith in Jesus Christ and who would come to church if you invited them. If you stay close to the Lord yourself, the Lord WILL use you to spread seeds of faith.

Let me tell you a story. "More than Coincidence" by April Grube (*Guideposts* 8/10 p. 39 "God's Guidance")

I settled into my seat on the redeye from L.A. to D.C.—a trip east to tour some college campuses before I had to make the big decision. The seat next to mine was empty and I couldn't wait to get some sleep. Then I spotted a big guy maneuvering down the aisle, bumping passengers and apologizing profusely, and I knew—lucky me—I had a seatmate. Sure enough, he sat next to me and started talking. "Never did like flying, always too hot or too cold. And these seats are too small, don't ya think? But I can't complain. Lord knows, I'm a blessed man..."

So much for sleep. At least I was used to the annoyances of flying. Every summer for the last six years I'd flown to South America for mission trips. I'd heard babies crying nonstop, had my seat kicked and my tray table bumped, often when I was deep in thought or prayer, trying to make sense of my faith in the context of the suffering I'd seen. Once I'd even lost my favorite book in the mad rush to disembark. So I smiled politely, listening to him chatter away. "Name's Billy," he finally said. "What's yours?"

"April," I said. "April Grube."

Abruptly, the man stopped talking. The strangest look came over his face. "Excuse me, but I didn't quite catch that," he said. I said my name again.

"Have you ever been to South America?" he asked. "When? What airline?"

South America? Was he on one of my mission trips? "You don't know me," he said, "but if it weren't for you, I don't know what would've become of me."

Three years earlier, Billy said, he was unemployed, living with his parents, desperately unhappy. He'd gone to South America, hoping new places would renew him. But everywhere he went, he saw suffering. *No God would allow such pain*, he thought. He headed home more miserable than ever. On the plane back, he searched his seat pocket for headphones. Instead, he found a book, *Searching for God Knows What*, by Donald Miller.

The pages were filled with handwritten notes. At first, Billy laughed at their sincerity and naiveté. But the doubts and questions and thoughts echoed his own. Here was someone else struggling with their faith. He read the book cover to cover. There, written on the last page, was the name of the owner: April Grube.

Don't let the devil to take away the words of God from your heart.

Do not allow testing or temptation to make you fall away from your faith.

Do not allow your faith to be choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life.

Instead, be sure the seeds of God's word fall into good soil in your life so that when you grow in faith, you WILL produce a hundredfold and you WILL hold your faith fast with an honest and good heart, and you WILL bear fruit with patient endurance, now, and forever and ever.

Amen.