

Opening

Check-in & Introductions

The Good Soil

The Bible Story

Please watch the story, following the link provided. If you would like to read the story as well, the text has been provided below.

Watch the Story *(Biblical adaptations written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

Together, watch the children’s story time found on Manchester Children & Families Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/178276089786532/>

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 13:1-23 (NRSV)

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!”

¹⁰Then the disciples came and asked him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” ¹¹He answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹²For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ¹³The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.’ ¹⁴With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

‘You will indeed listen, but never understand,
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.

¹⁵For this people’s heart has grown dull,
and their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
so that they might not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and understand with their heart and turn—
and I would heal them.’

¹⁶But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

¹⁸“Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who

hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³ But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Wondering Questions (Part I)

“Wondering Questions” are open ended discussion questions. These are the same questions that our children are working through!

Wondering Questions for Children *(written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

1. I wonder if the birds liked the seed they ate?
2. I wonder how heavy the bags of grain from the good soil were?
3. I wonder if the sower had a party when the good soil gave so much grain?

Wondering Questions for Older Children *(written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

4. In this story the sower did what he was supposed to do, he planted the seeds. Whose responsibility was it to make the seed grow? Could the sower have done any more than he did? If so, what?
5. All Christians have difficult times in their lives. At that time, what kind of soil do you most easily slip into?
6. When do you get the best harvest? What have you put into the soil of your life to make the harvest greater? Have you increased your Bible study or have you thought about Jesus as you cared for others?

What’s Going On

In the Good Shepherd children’s curriculum, a section called “Teacher Helps” is provided. This section gives a deeper background to us adults Please take turns reading through this section.

Teacher Helps *(written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

With the Western mind we all bring to the scriptures we have a difficult time understanding this Palestinian farmer from the parable of the Sower. Why on earth would anyone throw seed on the hard path, the rocky ground, or among the thorns? The American understanding of farming in us reacts unbelievably. But in Jesus' day the seed was thrown randomly and then the entire field was plowed under. The hard path, the thorns, the rocks that lay hidden under the soil and the good ground would all receive the same treatment from the sharp plowshare.

In this parable we have a good example of how the early church changed the emphasis of certain words of Jesus to be more appropriate to their needs. The original point of this parable is that in spite of all the problems with the planting, the harvest is still plentiful. One should not despair because of the normal hindrances to a 100% return, rather rejoice in that

which is plentiful in spite of all circumstances. However, the people of the early church tended to interpret this soil as different kinds of "hearers" of the word of God. C. H. Dodd suggests that we leave out the interpretation of this parable found in Matthew 13: 18-23. Those who taught the words of Jesus after his death most likely added this interpretation to the original story of Jesus. (The Parables of the Kingdom, C. H. Dodd, New York: Scribner's Sons, 1961, p.145)

It will be a challenge to teach this parable faithfully to the children because most of us grew up knowing the interpretation of the parable as well as the parable itself. Many of us can remember being asked which kind of soil we wanted to be. But for our Good Shepherd room the emphasis will be on the joyful harvest that comes at the end. The work of the sower will not be in vain. We will even smile at the thought of the birds liking the seed they ate from the path.

The wondering questions are designed to rejoice in the harvest and even the gift of food for the hungry birds of God's creation. These questions will help establish the emphasis of the parable on the possibilities for harvest in spite of problems with planting.

Wondering Questions (Part II)

Wondering Questions for Adults

1. How might a child hear this story? What might this story mean to a child?
2. Do you experience the Word of God as persistent and relentless? If so, how?
3. When have you felt like your experience of the Word was snatched up? When did it grow quickly but didn't have roots to sustain? When was it choked by the thorns of this world? And when has it been sustained in good soil?
4. Reflect on the following quote from Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas, *"The god in which I have faith does not speak to us as a static being. Rather, god speaks to us as a dynamic, restless force in our world. This, for me, is what god's revelation in Jesus is all about. The gospel of John tells us that in the beginning was the word and the word was with god, the word was god and the word became flesh. Inasmuch as Jesus is the incarnate word of god speaking to us, then for us to speak about god the way in which god speaks is for us to enflesh that very word that became flesh for us."*

Closing

Prayer

Holy God, thank you for the endless persistence of your grace. Thank you for the relentlessness of your Gospel. We ask for strong roots in your Word. Help us to tend to each other. Enflesh your church, today and always. **Amen.**

Study Link

<https://manchesterumc.org/all-church-study/>

"The Word that became flesh for us as Jesus Christ, now we as the Body of Christ, the church, are called to make real here and now. Enfleshed. Incarnate. Realized."