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Pentecost 7

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Miraculous Growth”

Text: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23; Isaiah 55:10-13; Romans 8:12-17

I preached on this Gospel for the youth at Higher Things a little over a week ago. So this sermon for you today is an slightly edited and expanded version of that sermon.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus is not giving you spiritual gardening tips today. He is describing the reality of living in our sinful and sin-filled world. This is the reality His disciples are going to face as they go out and proclaim and sow the Seed of His Word.

Furthermore, with this parable today, Jesus is not telling you to take a look at your heart and try to figure out how much is good soil or not, or to weed and unrock your heart, as if you could. Nor is this for us to compare ourselves to others, how weedy and rocky they are compared to us. No, this parable is *your reality*. **Jesus is describing your life.** What happens to the Word that is sown into your heart.

For consider . . . Perhaps this has happened to you . . . You stay up late one night, really late. Maybe for a really good reason! Because you were taking care of a sick child or a troubled friend. Or maybe you just had a lot on your mind - a project at work or school, a doctor appointment coming up, and your mind just kept racing and you couldn't get to sleep. Or maybe it was for a not so good reason. That happens too, right? And the next day is Sunday. So you get up and go to church, but you just. can't. focus. You're not following. You're too tired. And what happens? The Word that is read and preached and sung *is snatched away*. That ever happen to you?

Or maybe this . . . You did something you knew was wrong. You didn't want to do it, you knew you shouldn't do it, but you did it anyway. The temptation was too great, and you were too weak. It didn't really even seem that bad. Talking about that person behind their back, neglecting your responsibilities at home, looking at that stuff online . . . And maybe you even tried to justify it, wondering, questioning, *Did God really say . . . ?* And the Word of God, planted in you, *got choked*.

How 'bout one more . . . A friend of yours, or maybe someone in your family gets sick

or hurt - really bad. They're suffering, hurting, dying. And so are you, for them! Or your grandma gets Alzheimers and doesn't remember you anymore. Or internet trolls or real life bullies are making your life as a Christian bitter. And the questions come . . . *Why God? Why her? Why me? Do you even see, and care? Do you love me?* And the Word of God, planted in you, *got scorched* by the heat of sadness and tragedy and death.

If any of that has happened to you - and I'm pretty sure ALL of that has happened to ALL of you! - then you've lived this parable of Jesus today. There are a LOT of enemies of God's Word, all bearing down on you, attacking you. The devil and a sinful world from outside you, and your own hard-hearted sinful nature from inside you. And you think about all that - the attacks and assaults, the troubles and trials, the pounding and the persecution, and how life just seems to be getting harder and more complicated every day . . . and you realize: **It's a miracle the Word of God grows in us at all!**

Exactly! It's a miracle. It's not your doing. If it were, nothing would grow! But Jesus is working in you. And that's what Jesus wants you to know, what He is teaching us with this parable. That despite the best efforts of the devil, the world, and your own sinful nature to snatch and scorch and choke the Word of God, they're not going to win. Despite their best efforts, Jesus is going to produce a harvest in you.

And make no mistake about it: *it is all the work of Jesus*. You cannot unrock your heart, change the sinful nature you were born with, but Jesus can. The one who can command stones to become bread in the wilderness (Matthew 4:3), the one who can raise up children for Abraham from stones (Matthew 3:9), the one who can bring water from a rock in the wilderness (Exodus 17), and the one who could not be held in the tomb by a great rock . . . yeah, that one can give you a heart of flesh and make your heart into good soil, which will produce a harvest for His Word.

And He not only *can*, He *has*! He did when you were baptized. By water and the Word, He raised up a child of Abraham and made your heart a place where His Word can grow and produce good fruit. Maybe even a hundredfold! Though thirtyfold is a lot, too. I think I'd take that!

So they're not going to win. These enemies of God and His Word aren't going to win because **they've already been defeated by Jesus**. He took on the temptations of the devil and the world, the worst they could dish out. And He won. On the cross, the Seed promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David, the Seed that was sown into the womb of Mary, on the cross, He was scorched and choked and attacked. And dead. Really dead. *Planted* six feet under dead. Under a great rock.

And then that Seed grew! They could not keep Him down or dead in the tomb. He rose and grew and is still growing. **He won on the cross and He is winning in you.** And His harvest is more than we know, more than we can count, more than we can imagine. More than *the sand on the seashore or the stars in the heavens*. The Word of the Lord *now planted in you*.

So yes, you're going to be attacked, and attacked hard - by the weeds of sin, the scorching heat of persecution, and the hatred of the devil, but the Word of the Lord grows. And not a little. Abundantly. Lavishly. And directly in the face of all these enemies! Because Jesus didn't just sow His Seed in you *once*. He continues sowing His Seed in you.

For now consider this . . . That the Scriptures and Liturgy aren't just words *about* Jesus - they are Jesus speaking to you and sowing the Seed of His Word into your heart. And every time you *read* His Word, or *hear* His Word, or *sing* His Word, He is sowing His Seed in you, that you know all that He has done for you and promised you. **And that Seed grows.**

When you succumb to temptation, when you fail and fall, He throws the Seed of His Word into your ears and plants it into your heart and says: I died for those sins! *I forgive you all your sins!* **And that Seed grows.**

When you have doubts and fears and troubles, He throws the Seed of His Word into your ears and plants it in your heart and says: *I baptized you! You are mine*, and I'm not letting you go! **And that Seed grows.**

When you're faced with death, so fearsome and so final, so filled with sorrow and dread, He throws the Seed of His Word into your ears and plants it into your heart and says: *Been there! Done that! Came out alive!* And you will, too. In Me. **And that Seed grows.**

And when you are scorched and choked and weak, He throws the Seed of His Word into your ears - *and your mouths!* His Body and Blood feeding, nourishing, strengthening you. **And that Seed grows.**

For as Isaiah reminded us this morning, ***the Word of God does not return empty. It accomplishes that for which He sends it, and it succeeds in that for which He sent it.*** And God's will is that His Word grow in you. That even in the midst of the persistent attacks of the devil and the world and your own sinful nature, you be ***led by the Spirit of God***, as St. Paul told the Romans, and so a harvest of good works and good fruit be produced in you.

So what to do? What can you do if you cannot unrock your heart or weed your heart and make it grow? Well, first of all, repent. That's always good to do! Repent of your part in all this. Your sinful nature and how you have rebelled against God and His Word. For you have. Me, too. And then hear and receive the forgiveness you need. The forgiveness that can change your hard and rocky sinful nature into good soil.

But then, this too: **drone swarm your heart!** *Drone swarm it with God's Word!* One or two seeds are an easy target. But a hundred? Or more?

Moses told the people of old to do this, when they were getting ready to enter the Promised Land. He told them: *have God's Word everywhere!* On their clothing, on the walls and doors of their houses, on their hands - even hanging between their eyes! When they get up in the morning and when they go to bed at night. His point being to have the Word of God always around you and always being sown in you. That though some be snatched and some be scorched and some be choked, some also grow and produce a harvest in you. That you always have hope - not in yourself! - but in the words and promises of God. For His Word never fails. Not even when it is crucified.

So Jesus sends His disciples out into such a world. This is what they will see. This is what they will experience. In those they preach to and in themselves. Scorching, choking, snatching, and a harvest - all of the above. And you, too. This is your life, because Christ is your life. If they attacked Him they will also attack you. But He won, and so you will win. He is your hope. He is your victory. So no matter what is going on in your life, look to Him. Listen to Him. Follow Him. He is growing in you. And producing a harvest. Count on Him. *He won't let you down.*

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.