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6th Sunday After Pentecost (A) 7/12/20 youtube link:

TEXT: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

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A HERD of BUFFALO was grazing
on the range where the DEER and the ANTELOPE play.

Suddenly...a COWBOY came riding up.

He jumped off his horse...got right in the FACE of a buffalo...and said:

“You are the sorriest excuse for a buffalo I’ve ever seen!

*Your eyes are bloodshot...your hair is dirty and matted...
...and you stink!”*

With THAT...he jumped BACK on his horse...and rode AWAY.

The BUFFALO he’d talked to

TURNED to his NEIGHBORING buffalo...and said:

--“You know...I think I just heard a DISCOURAGING WORD.” ☺

(pause)

Obviously...that’s a JOKE on the CHORUS

of the old “Home on the Range” western campfire song.

HOWEVER...ALL of us have to DEAL with

DISCOURAGEMENT and DISCOURAGING WORDS

from time to time.

And that’s ESPECIALLY true TODAY

...with everything we’re DEALING with from the COVID-19!

At times we Christians may WONDER...

--if our PRAYERS get above the ceiling

--if we have any Christian INFLUENCE in the world with our lives

--if our church makes any real DIFFERENCE in our community

--and if FAITH is anything MORE than wishful thinking.

(pause)

*
Well...guess what?

SO did Jesus' DISCIPLES!

--especially as they went out on EVANGELISM missions
sharing his WORD with people!

WHAT did JESUS have to SAY about this?

HOW did he ENCOURAGE them?

And...does THAT apply to US...TODAY?

(pause)

**I.) Jesus KNEW that talking with people
about HIM...about his MINISTRY...about God and God's Kingdom
could be DIFFICULT and DISCOURAGING at times.**

He KNEW that his MESSAGE
would not ALWAYS be well-received.

AND he knew
that THIS could get his disciple' MORALE down.

**A.] So...he told them a PARABLE
that COMPARED the Kingdom of God
to a SOWER going out and spreading SEED.**

As we KNOW:

--some of the seed falls on HARD ground
...and is unable to take root

--some of it falls on SHALLOW ground
...and initially sprouts...but later withers away

--and some of it falls on GOOD earth
...and produces a rich harvest.

Jesus EXPLAINS the parable saying:

--the SOWER is God
 --the SEED is the Kingdom
 --and the various types of SOIL represent people.

On the SURFACE...it does NOT sound
 LIKE God is a very EFFECTIVE farmer!

After all...in the parable
 ...MOST of the seed that is sown NEVER takes ROOT!

B.] But the parable imitates LIFE.

Very OFTEN...that **WAS** the WAY it WAS
 for Jesus and his disciples!

And it still **IS**...for US!

WE do the work of EVANGELISM...we "*SOW the SEEDS*"...
 --TALKING with people...family...friends...even strangers
 --SHARING our faith stories
 --HELPING and SERVING people who are in need
 --and INVITING folks to FAITH and to our CHURCH.

But OFTEN what we RECEIVE
 ...are DISCOURAGING WORDS!

We KNOW that seeds ARE being SOWN...but we CANNOT predict
 --WHICH seeds will bear FRUIT!
 --and for SURE...not HOW or what KIND of fruit!

So OFTEN...we NEVER see any RESULTS!

People don't RESPOND the way we WANT them to!

They don't ACCEPT our messages...ideas...and invitations
 the way we THINK they should!

We "*BUILD the better MOUSETRAP*"
 ...but people don't COME to it.

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Even some MEMBERS stay away from our church
on Sunday mornings!

Oh...I KNOW that due to the current COVID Critter Crisis
--we HAVE to stay away from our church BUILDINGS
and worship from our HOMES right now

“Being SAFE...IS being FAITHFUL!”
--as our ELCA Bishop Elizabeth Eaton assures us.

But BEFORE the COVID Critter hit
...OUR church...and Christian churches EVERYWHERE...
--were FAR from FULL!

REMEMBER?

We WORK and we WORK...and we WORK!

And SOMETIMES it seems
--that we’re going NOWHERE!
--or maybe even BACKWARDS!

And after a WHILE...that can become very...VERY...
FRUSTRATING and DISCOURAGING!

Can’t it!

Sometimes we WONDER if our planting...watering...and fertilizing efforts
have BEEN for NAUGHT!

(pause)

II.) Well... JESUS knows all ABOUT this!

He KNOWS it will BE this way!

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The Rev. LEONARD SWEET says:

“Put on your thinking caps for a moment.

Become an amateur pastor or theologian

...and see if YOU can give an ANSWER to the following 3 questions:

1. If the gospel is the power of God

--why doesn't everybody who hears the gospel become a Christian?

2. If the Bible is the Word of God

--why doesn't the Bible have the same effect on everyone who reads it?

--why don't most people read the Bible...believe it...

and have it change their lives?

3. If Jesus is the Son of God

--why doesn't everyone believe in Jesus?”

Sweet CONTINUES with THIS interesting scenario:

“If an alien were to come to planet Earth and ask for a report

...on what god is worshiped

...on what religious book is followed

...or on what religion is practiced

--Christians would have to give a MINORITY report

because the vast majority of this world is not Christian! 😊

Well... JESUS knows all ABOUT this!

In FACT...that's WHY he TOLD this PARABLE

--to ANSWER all 3 of these QUESTIONS!

Jesus KNOWS it will BE this way!

It was THIS way for HIM.

It was THIS way for his DISCIPLES

*
So WHY should it be any OTHER way...for US?

That's SMALL consolation...perhaps.

But it IS...CONSOLATION!

When we become DISCOURAGED...we can KNOW...

--that our Lord completely UNDERSTANDS!

(pause)

And here's ANOTHER consolation...and ENCOURAGEMENT:

**III.) We are NOT responsible for the RESULTS.
We are ONLY responsible for the EFFORT.**

Notice: Jesus did NOT tell his disciples:

"Folks, I'm very disappointed in you!

You're not achieving the RESULTS that we PROJECTED.

Your SALES numbers are DOWN!

You're not bringing in your QUOTA of new members!

Did I totally WASTE my time TRAINING you?

I'm very disappointed in you!

And if your NUMBERS don't IMPROVE

...I'm gonna HAVE to let you GO

and HIRE a WHOLE new SALES force!"

Nope.

Jesus did NOT say ANY of this!

Why not?

Because he KNEW the REALITIES of HUMAN NATURE.

He KNEW that SOME people would ACCEPT him and his message

--but the MOST would REJECT.

He KNEW that MANY people would either

--REJECT him OUTRIGHT!

--or ACCEPT him outright...

...but then FALL AWAY over TIME

when they REALIZED the COMMITMENTS
which FOLLOWING him REQUIRES!

THAT's why Jesus TOLD his disciples this PARABLE

1.) to PREPARE them

for the RECEPTION and REJECTION that was coming

2.) to REASSURE them

that they were NOT responsible for the RESULTS

...ONLY for their EFFORT

3.) to HELP the to NOT get too DISCOURAGED.

And Jesus tells US these SAME things...

...for the same REASONS...TODAY!

(pause)

OK...NOW...for some really GOOD news!

**IV.) SOME people will REJECT our Lord and his message of life
...but SOME will RECEIVE him!**

A.] True...some people REJECT...and pay the price!

Rev. PETER ANDREW SMITH tells this humorous little STORY.

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A gardener named John pulled up another plant.

“Honestly, I wish we could grow weeds instead of vegetables.”
he told his wife, Carol.

“If we planted weeds we wouldn’t get our exercise...would we?”
Carol said from the other side of the garden.

John looked over at the pile of weeds from the morning’s work and replied:

“Are you SURE that would be such a BAD thing?” ☺
(pause)

SOME people are CONTENT

--with LIFE as it IS

--with NOT having to make faith DECISIONS

--with NOT having to EXERCISE their FAITH and GROW in it

--and with letting WEEDS grow

in the GARDENS of their LIVES.

DOING that...LETTING the WEEDS grow...

...HEARING our Lord’s message of life

...but REJECTING him and it...for WHATEVER reasons

--can have REAL life CONSEQUENCES...

...ETERNAL life consequences! ☹

The “WEEDS” in the WORLD

can take OVER someone’s LIFE...

--just as SURELY and as QUICKLY

as weed PLANTS can take OVER a GARDEN!

Reject JESUS -- and that CAN and WILL happen...all the time!

How SAD!

How MUCH those people miss OUT on in LIFE!

(pause)

B.] But some people ACCEPT Jesus and his message...and LIVE it!

One of Biblical Scholar WILLIAM BARCLAY’s friends tells THIS story.

In the church where he worshiped

there was a lonely old man...old Thomas.

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Thomas had outlived all of his friends
and hardly anyone knew him.

When Thomas died...Barclay's friend had the feeling
there would be no one to go to the funeral.

He decided to go so there would be someone
to follow the old man to his final resting-place.

As it turned out...nobody else went.
And it was a miserable wet day.

The funeral reached the cemetery
and at the gate there was a soldier waiting.

On his raincoat...there were no rank badges.

The soldier came to the graveside for the ceremony.

When it was over...he stepped forward.

And before the open grave...he swept his hand up to a salute
that might have been given to a king!

Barclay's friend walked away with this soldier.

And as they walked
the wind blew the soldier's raincoat open
--and revealed the shoulder badges of a Brigadier General!

The General said:

"You will perhaps be wondering what I am doing here.

Years ago Thomas was my Sunday School teacher.

I was a wild lad...and a sore trial to him.

He never knew what he did for me,

but I owe everything I am or will be to old Thomas.

*

And today I had to come to salute him at the end.”

(pause)

Old Thomas had NOT fully KNOWN what he was doing
...or the IMPACT and INFLUENCE his ministry HAD.

No pastor...teacher...or “*rank and file*” Christian ever DOES!

MUCH of the time we NEVER know
WHEN or WHERE or HOW *the “seeds take root”* !

But SOME people DO accept Jesus and his message...and LIVE it!

Our SHARING with them PAYS OFF!

HOWEVER...WE are not RESPONSIBLE for the RESULTS.

We are ONLY responsible for the EFFORT.

We're to just KEEP ON sowing the SEED
...and leave the REST to GOD!

(pause)

V.) FINALLY...what about US?

What about OUR reception?

Do WE actively RECEIVE Jesus and his word...every day...and live it?

In “What Kind of Soil Are You, What Kind of Sower?”

...Rev. CHARLES HOFFACKER says:

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*“The stories Jesus tells are NOT subject to OUR control.
He tells these stories so that WE can be TRANSFORMED.
Jesus tells these stories,
--not so that WE can ask questions about THEM
--but so that the STORIES can ask questions of US!”*

In "Marinating in the Spirit" ...Rev LEONARD SWEET suggests:

*“The question is really
...what is the state of OUR hearts when the seeds are sown with US?
What soil does your spirit soak in?
How do you nourish and ensure that your spirit
is secure...peaceful...confident...and satisfied?”*

Sweet CHALLENGES:

*“In today's day and age...your ANSWER might be a default
to ‘physical’ or ‘emotional wellness’:*

Exercise each day.

Eat a good diet.

Do yoga.

Meditate in nature.

Accumulate sufficient wealth.

Attain job security.

Foster good relationships and reject toxic people.

Take a bubble bath.

Buy yourself something nice.

Take a trip.

Do something you love to do.” (like go out and fly an RC airplane, Leonard? 😊)

Sweet says:

*“I'm sure you've heard these solutions and more
for feeling down in the dumps
or in need of a lift
or maybe to feel better about losing some weight.*

But these are ‘limited fixes’.

*
*While they all may help gain specific goals and contribute to happiness,
they don't get to the bottom of what drives the human spirit."*

He' s RIGHT!
And the REAL answer...is JESUS!

HE's the ONE -- we CAN and SHOULD "*soak our spirits in*"!

HE's the ONE -- who can NOURISH and ENSURE that our spirits
ARE secure...peaceful...confident...and satisfied!

HE's the ONE --who GIVES us...LIFE!

**SO...what are YOU and I doing to make SURE
that WE are the kind of SOIL our Lord can GROW in?
(PAUSE)**

Well... "*BUFFALO*" or "*NO buffalo*"...out there "*on the RANGE*"...
Jesus KNOWS that talking with people
--about HIM...about his MINISTRY...
--about God and God's Kingdom
...can be DIFFICULT and DISCOURAGING at times.

He KNOWS that his MESSAGE
--will not ALWAYS be well-received.
--and that at TIMES...we WILL hear "*DISCOURAGING WORDS*"!

But ...WHEN we become discouraged...
--WE know that our Lord UNDERSTANDS!
SOME people will REJECT our Lord and his message of life.
But SOME will RECEIVE him!

In many PLACES and many WAYS...we "*SOW the SEEDS*"
--TALKING with people...family...friends...even strangers
--SHARING our faith stories
--HELPING and SERVING people who are in need
--and INVITING folks to FAITH and to our CHURCH.

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The EVANGELISM opportunities are HERE!
They're all AROUND us!

MARTIN LUTHER saw HIS opportunities.

He wrote:

*“While I sat in the TAVERN and spoke my WORDS
...the Holy Spirit did his work!”*

And in saying THAT... Luther points to a really cool and powerful promise!

The focus of the lesson is NOT on what **WE** do...but on what **GOD** does.

Soil is PASSIVE!

It is what GOD does that BRINGS about FRUIT!

So...go OUT and BROADCAST the “seeds” of “Good News” !

And God will cause the fruits of your efforts
to mature in due course...in the ways God has planned.
(pause)

And THAT's probably the GREATEST cure
for “Discouraging Words” and DISCOURAGEMENT
that there IS! ☺

T. B.T. G.! AMEN!