

Third Sunday after Pentecost

June 13, 2021

“Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed... Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn’t have deep roots, it died.”

Mark 4:3, 5-6 (NLT)

*Call to Worship

God scatters the seeds of reconciliation and love, and waits....

So much of it lands on flat pathways or rocky roads and won’t take root....

God scatters the seeds of healing and hope, and waits....

Shallowness and fear claim the seeds and they cannot live.

God scatters the seeds of redemption and peace, and waits....

***These are the places of deep growth where the seed
will cast down strong roots.***

Welcome this day to a seed-scattering station!

May our hearts be the rich soil in which God’s love takes root. AMEN.

*Praise

“Come, Christians, Join to Sing”

UMH 158

***Opening Prayer**

Holy God, Creator of Life, you call us out of our dark places, offering us the grace of new life. When we see nothing but hopelessness, you surprise us with the breath of your Spirit. Call us out of our complacency and routines, set us free from our self-imposed bonds, and fill us with your Spirit of life, compassion, and peace, In the name of Jesus, your anointed one, we pray. Amen.

Share How You Can Present Your Offering to God

Make your offering personal...through a donation or an act of service...bring to God an offering of praise and gratitude!

Sing the Doxology Together

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

A Prayer of the People with Mark 4

God who plants seeds of hope and justice within our lives, we are so grateful for this community of faith and for all, anywhere, who hunger and thirst for your healing, reconciling word. You know all the things that are on our hearts today and you bring us together in love and support. We ask your healing mercies with those who struggle with illness of every kind, with feeling lost and marginalized; for those who mourn and for whom the darkness of sorrow enshrouds them. We ask your growth-producing love for all those who celebrate and rejoice today. Be with each one of us and all those whom we have named in our hearts before you. Help us to reach out to each other in compassion and support, for we ask these things in Jesus' name. AMEN.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

God's Word

Mark 4:3; 5-6; 16-17 (NLT)

(see below)

The Word of God for the people of God...Thanks be to God!

Message

"Rocky Soil: The Shallow Soul"

Pastor Clark

See Message Below

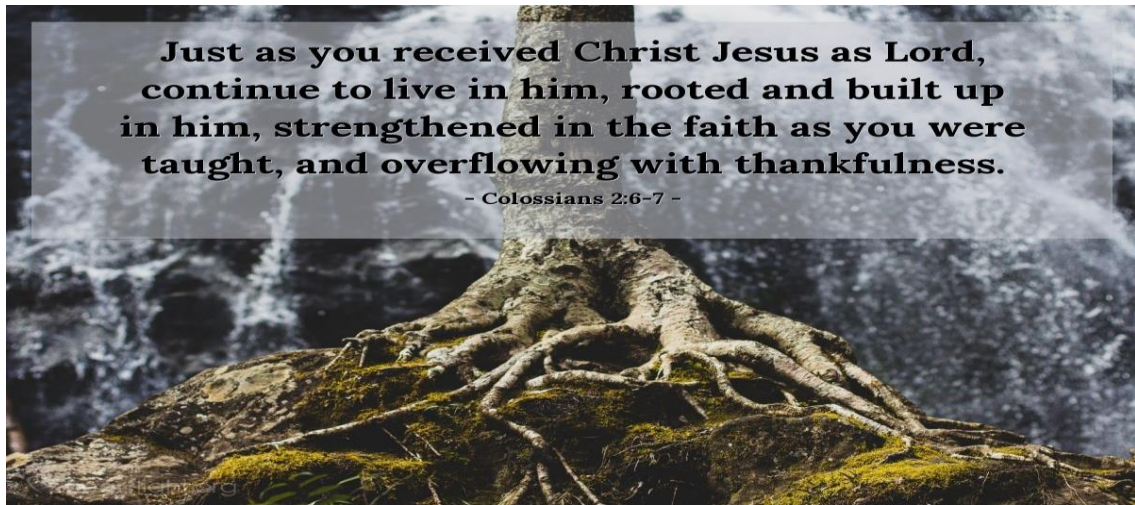
*Hymn of Faith

"I Am Thine, O Lord"

UMH 419

Blessing

Now that you have welcomed Jesus Christ into your lives, continue to journey with Him. Allow Him to shape your lives. Let your roots grow down deep into Him, and let Him build you up on a firm foundation. Be strong in the faith—just as you were taught—and let your lives spill over with thanksgiving. And may the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, and the intimate presence of the Holy spirit be with you all. Amen.



Mark 4: 1-9 (NLT) *Once again Jesus began teaching by the lakeshore. A very large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat in the boat while all the people remained on the shore. ² He taught them by telling many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: ³ “Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. ⁴ As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it. ⁵ Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn’t have deep roots, it died. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain. ⁸ Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!” ⁹ Then he said, “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.*

Then Jesus said to them, “If you can’t understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables? ¹⁴ The farmer plants seed by taking God’s word to others. ¹⁵ The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message, only to have Satan come at once and take it away. ¹⁶ The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. ¹⁸ The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God’s word, ¹⁹ but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced. ²⁰ And the seed that fell on good soil represents those who hear and accept God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!””

Come, Christians, Join to Sing

1 Come, Christians, join to sing:

Alleluia! Amen!

loud praise to Christ our King:

Alleluia! Amen!

Let all, with heart and voice,

before his throne rejoice;

praise is his gracious choice.

Alleluia! Amen!

2 Come, lift your hearts on high:

Alleluia! Amen!

Let praises fill the sky:

Alleluia! Amen!

He is our guide and friend;

to us he'll condescend;

his love shall never end:

Alleluia! Amen!

3 Praise yet the Lord again:

Alleluia! Amen!

Life shall not end the strain:

Alleluia! Amen!

On heaven's blissful shore

his goodness we'll adore,

singing forevermore:

Alleluia! Amen!

I Am Thine, O Lord

1. I am thine, O Lord, I have heard thy voice, and it told thy love to me; but I long to rise in the arms of faith and be closer drawn to thee.

Refrain: Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord, to the cross where thou hast died. Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord, to thy precious, bleeding side.

2. Consecrate me now to thy service, Lord, by the power of grace divine; let my soul look up with a steadfast hope, and my will be lost in thine. (Refrain)

3. O the pure delight of a single hour that before thy throne I spend, when I kneel in prayer, and with thee, my God, I commune as friend with friend! (Refrain)

4. There are depths of love that I cannot know till I cross the narrow sea; there are heights of joy that I may not reach till I rest in peace with thee. (Refrain)

Rocky Soil: The Shallow Soul

Mark 4:3; 5-6; 16-17 (NLT)

“Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed... ⁵ Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn’t have deep roots, it died.

The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word.

Introduction

I once had a neighbor who wanted his lawn to be perfect. Obsessed would be an accurate word to describe his passion about this. As a classic do-it-yourself-er, he tried everything in his power to make it such. Went to Lowes or Home Depot to buy the best equipment and lawn treatment money could buy. Religiously applied it. He reseeded areas that didn’t grow. Covered them with straw. Watered it faithfully. Mowed and trimmed it immaculately. To his surprise and disgust, however, there were still areas that simply couldn’t sustain grass. The newly planted seed germinated but by mid-summer had dried out and left ugly brown patches...along with other patches that just didn’t look healthy. At considerable expense, he finally called a landscaping company to solve the problem. They quickly uncovered the mystery. In some areas of his front yard, a layer of rock lay below the surface. Those areas had only a thin layer of topsoil. Grass would germinate but never thrive under those conditions. They actually told him there wasn’t enough depth for roots to grow properly and that the rock caused the temperature in that soil to be so elevated that it became unhealthy for the grass.

Jesus says, in the portion of the parable we look at today, that same thing happens in the hearts and souls of people. These people are exposed to the seed of God’s Word, they hear the gospel and respond. It all seems so promising. They are interested. They are seemingly emotionally touched by it all. They are enthusiastic. But then, something happens that prevents what began in such a promising manner to keep growing and developing.

This morning, we want to explore why this happens so often. And since, as I mentioned last week, that we are each of the four soils at different seasons of our lives, this has astonishing relevance to all of us. The secondary question lurking behind this, is how can the seed of God’s Word continue to thrive in all the seasons of our lives.

There are a few things I want to mention as a way of clarifying the context. First, the Sower sows seed extravagantly...lavishly across all kinds of soil. His indiscriminate scattering of seed seems to be a waist; but Jesus makes it a point to accent that this is how the Sower sows the seed of the kingdom!

Next, as my obsessed neighbor from year's past illustrated, some seed fell on rocky soil. ***The idea here is not that there was a bunch of rocks, but that there was only a thin layer of topsoil with solid rock underneath.*** That certainly fits with the terrain of much of this region. It was and still is a rocky, stone-dominant terrain. Jesus' hearers would immediately understand the analogy.

Respond Readily

"Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow."

John MacArthur mentions this about this soil: *"The rocky soil represents those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy. They're the opposite of the hard hearts. They are receptive. They are interested. Not only are they interested, they are emotional about it. They are exhilarated by it. They're thrilled with it. And they receive it with joy. But these have no root."*

The great German pastor and theologian, Helmut Thielicke, who courageously stood against the Nazi and who helped his country rebuild after the war said this: *"There is nothing more cheering than transformed Christian people and there is nothing more discouraging than people who have been merely 'brushed' by Christianity, people who have been sown with a thousand seeds but in whose lives there is no depth and no rootage."*

Have you been merely ***"brushed"*** by Christianity? In your eagerness to respond to the emotions of the moment, did you get a taste of real faith, but not a full helping, not enough to take root in your soul?

Wilt Under Pressure

"But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn't have deep roots, it died."

Life under the hot sun caused these tender shoots to wither and die. Likewise, when people first respond to the seed of God's sowing, they too are tender and vulnerable. When the heat of problems or life pressures or even persecution mount, they too wither and die off.

They receive the Word at first, but then all of a sudden trouble, pressure, trials, tests, affliction, and persecution come. Maybe this is what goes through their minds: *"Wasn't everything supposed to be better? Everything got worse. I had people who used to love me who now hate me. I had people I used to hang around with and we got along fine, but now because I claim to be a Christian they resent everything about me and want nothing to do with me. Now I have a whole new group of enemies who used to be my friends."*

"They believe for a while." That's an important statement. There are people who believe for a while but in time of temptation fall away. Jesus said in John 8:31, *"If you continue in My word, then you are truly*

disciples of Mine." The writer of Hebrews talks about true believers being those who persevere. Paul told the Colossians about the true believer who continues in the faith, contrasted with those who believe for a while.

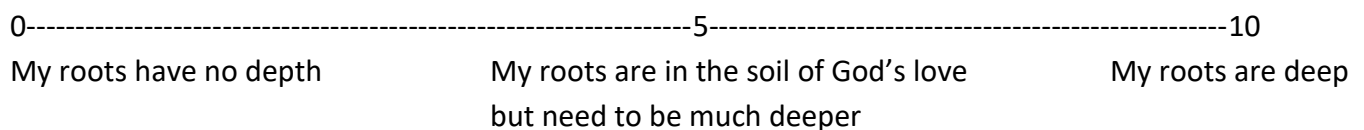
There are people who believe for a while. But a test causes them to disappear, to wither and die. This test is tribulation—*thlipsis*, according to Matthew 13:21—pressure, affliction, and even persecution.

They thought when you got Jesus you got rid of all your problems. They thought you got health, wealth, and happiness. They thought you got prosperity. They thought you got an endless wardrobe, money coming out of heaven, miracles, bodily healing. They thought angels were going to come down and talk to you and solve all your problems. They thought this was going to be a fellowship of people where there wouldn't be any problems or conflicts or disappointments. They thought they would find a new kind of life.

A Key Question

Is my faith putting down deep roots? Without a doubt, shallow roots are a major threat to our faith. Why does this happen? Ron Hutchcraft mentions these possibilities: Shallow spiritual roots come in several varieties. There's ***Environmental faith***--the kind that is strong when you're in your Christian world but caves in when you're not. And then there's ***Second-hand faith***. That's a faith that isn't really yours firsthand--it's rooted in your parent's Christianity, or your church's faith, or your pastor's faith, or your Christian friends. There isn't much really going on directly between you and Jesus. That will never survive a storm. ***Stagnant faith***--that's another form of shallow roots. Not much new has happened between you and Jesus for a long time, and consequently, He seems farther--He seems less real than He used to. And when a test or temptation hits, it won't be enough to keep you standing. And one other kind of "shallow-roots-Christianity"--***Event faith***--the kind that depends on the next spiritual event, the next high, the next big, Christian experience to keep you going. In between, you go into a deep valley. That kind of relationship with Christ is going down eventually.

If you did a "root analysis" on your own life right now, where would you put yourself on the graph below?



My Story: When I came to Christ as a fifteen-year-old, I had some folks that mentored and nurtured me in the faith. We studied the gospel of Mark together for a number of weeks. I soon found myself in a small group with other guys my age with our Youth Pastor. I was encouraged to almost immediately put my faith into action with service in the church and work camps in our region. Then later in my high school years, I had the privilege of having peers who shared my faith and we encouraged and challenged one

another to be active in small groups that helped us translate what being a Christ-follower looked like for a teen in our day. All these things helped me deepen my roots!

Conclusion

“Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.”

You might think these words target the age of Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. They certainly fit life with smartphones, big data and “friends” by the hundreds. But, in fact, Richard Foster penned this opening paragraph to his classic book ***“Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth”*** almost 40 years ago. Before the Internet and email. Before anyone thought of God-apps.

Deep is good, right? Friends want to have deep conversations. Philosophers want to think deep thoughts. Coaches want to have a deep bench. Fans want their teams to go deep into the playoffs. Investors are hoping for a deep recovery. Gardeners want their plants to have deep roots.

"Deep" implies substance. If something is deep, it's profound, it's sufficient, it's real, it's enduring. We want to be deep people. We want to live deep lives.

It is, however, hard being Christian in today's world...hard to be a deep person today...hard to be a growing believer...hard to send deep roots down into the soil of God's grace, the world is aligned against developing deep roots...

- Storms: life's troubles and calamities
- Stones: underlying rock of past hurts and wounds; painful experiences; unforgiven sin

Colossians 2:6-7 (NLT)

And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. ⁷Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.

Let's be transparent with one another...we all have difficulties doing that, don't we? I know it's challenging for me. Busyness, hurry sickness, distractions, the internet that shapes us toward superficial living, conflict, culture wars, let alone the pressures and problems of life...they all conspire against sinking deep roots in our souls. They make me and us vulnerable to skimming our way through our spiritual lives. There is an immense pull toward the superficial. Well, here are some immensely practical, hands-on ways to deepen our roots. You cannot do all of them, but choose one of them to put into practice.

Just for your benefit, I have them on a page for you to take home. Again, choose one to begin your root-deepening journey.

Six Practical Actions that Will Help You Grow Deep

1. ***Dive into the Deep!*** Leave casual Christianity and declare your desire to be an apprentice to Jesus...to become more like Jesus, determine to nourish the inner you as John Ortberg says:

*"I hate how spiritual formation (deep roots in our faith) gets positioned as an optional pursuit for a small special interest group within the church. **Spiritual formation is for everyone.** Just as there is an **"outer you"** that is being formed and shaped all the time, like it or not, by accident or on purpose, so there is an **"inner you."** You have a spirit. And it's constantly being shaped and tugged at: by what you hear and watch and say and read and think and experience. Everyone is being spiritually formed all the time. Whether they want to or not. Whether they're Christian or not. The question isn't if someone will sign up for spiritual formation; it's just who and what our spirits will be formed by."*

2. ***Slow down to be with Jesus...*** deepen your everyday relationship with Jesus...cultivate a greater awareness of Jesus with you at home, at work, at conversation, in times of pressure and times of pleasure and relaxation,,,

"An emotionally healthy disciple slows down to be with Jesus, goes beneath the surface of their life to be deeply transformed by Jesus, and offers their life as a gift to the world for Jesus." Peter Scazzero

3. ***Spend consistent time reading Scripture using the lectio-divina pattern (see separate page)***
4. Once a week go on a ***prayer walk***...pray as you walk for the cares of your hearts as well as anything God places before you as you walk.
5. ***Cultivate a spiritual friendship*** that allows you to talk with genuine transparency about faith
6. ***Give yourself away***...find a tangible way to selflessly serve in a way that uplifts someone else

To Practice Lectio Divina

Practicing this spiritual discipline **opens us up to more ways to hear from, experience, and respond to God**—individually and communally. A benefit of *lectio divina* is that there is less temptation to read solely in order to consume information. In whatever way you interact with the Bible, Scripture is meant to be read with ears open to hear God’s voice through his Word and respond! To practice *lectio divina* yourself, select a passage of Scripture (if you don’t have one in mind, start with Isaiah 55 or Psalm 23). Set a timer for 20 minutes (so you don’t think about how much time you have left), and go through the following exercise slowly. Enjoy the time. Listen to the Spirit.

Silence: Prepare to enter this devotional time by singing a hymn, reading a psalm, or praying. Thank God for life and his presence. This time is for you to slow down and focus. Sit comfortably, alert, and relaxed. Try, if you can, to put away your thoughts of the day and ready yourself to listen. Start with a simple prayer, such as: “Lord, put me in a place to enter into your presence.”

Reading: Read the passage aloud (or silently, if you are not in a place where you can read aloud). Listen for a word that sticks out to you (for example, in Psalm 23, it could be “shepherd” or “dwell” or “green pastures”). Read the passage again. If one word or phrase stood out the first time, see if it does the second time. Begin to repeat this word or phrase to yourself and let it resonate with you. If nothing sticks out, that is okay; just read again! Imagine someone taking a highlighter and pointing out one word or phrase. Remember, this is not a performance-driven exercise (spiritual devotions are not meant to be about performance; they’re meant for worship of our Most High God!). Focus on spending time with God in his Word.

Meditation: Reread the passage. Meditate upon your word or phrase and ask God how this word speaks to your life. This could be a realization, feeling, sensory perception, image, thought, etc. Let your imagination be engaged, as well as your heart and mind. As these images, thoughts, and feelings come to you, take time to think about them. When you feel like praying, move to the next phase.

Prayer: Pray what you most desire to say to God, and then listen! Journal and write down thoughts that come to mind, and what you believe God is speaking to you. Listen to the Holy Spirit to discover a possible invitation relevant to today, the next few days, or the year to come. It could be an action to take, a truth to discover about God, a way of life to change, someone to forgive, or something to celebrate. As you sense God bringing the time to a close (or your timer goes off!) pray to close the time.

Contemplation: Pray that you will be able to respond to God in the ways he’s spoken. Celebrate hearing from God and simply be still. Reflect on the experience. Regardless of how you feel, thank God for the chance to encounter him and his living Word. Ask God to bless you, especially if you feel called to an **action**.