

Sermon for July 12, 2026
Pastor Michael D. Costello

Title: We Are Farmers

Texts: Isaiah 55:10–13; Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

I moved to my new house in late 2024, so last year was the first full calendar year in the new place. As is always the case when moving, you learn things. Some of those are lovely, like the way the morning sun streams through the windows at certain times of year or discovering the beautiful flowers that come up each spring. Other things are less lovely, of course, like learning that the upstairs stays a little too warm year-round or that the water heater really should have been replaced before it flooded the basement.

Some things are just plain mystery, however, like looking out the window last July and realizing that we had corn growing in our flower bed. We had so much conversation about this, asking questions like: “Who on earth planted corn?” And “For what purpose?” In a very humorous act last fall, my teenage children decided to harvest this corn, which we quickly decided was not fit for consumption by humans. One day while we were gone, however, the dog helped himself and, evidently, it wasn’t that bad.

Not being farmers, we were told by others that the corn was likely the result of birds picking up the seed and *leaving* it, shall we say, in our yard. However it got there, the soil was rich and ready to support growth. That much was certain.

In today’s gospel reading from Matthew Jesus tells a parable about a sower who sowed seeds in various kinds of soil. Some of the seeds fell on the path, where birds—like those in my neighborhood—at them up. Other seeds fell on rocky or thorny ground and yet others fell on good soil. We are not surprised to learn that it was the seeds that fell on good soil that brought forth grain.

After a bit of back and forth with the disciples (not in today’s lectionary text), Jesus goes on to explain how these various kinds of soil represent the ways in which the “word of the kingdom” is received. Again, by the end, we are not surprised to learn that we are called to be like good soil, reading and digesting the Word of God, seeking to understand it, and watching as it bears fruit in our lives.

The problem as I see it is that I constantly fall short and often resemble those other kinds of soil. I don’t always understand the word, which evidently makes me less like good soil and more like the trampled dirt of the path. Or maybe I struggle when times get tough, which they inevitably do in this life, which makes me more like the rocky soil. Or maybe I get caught up in concerns about whether I have enough, whether I produce enough, whether I simply am enough, and then I’m evidently like the soil thick with thorns.

And so we’re left asking the question: How are we to become good soil if we are “in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves?”

I think we have an opportunity at this moment to say some of the quiet parts out loud. There isn't a single person in this room or on the face of this planet that is good soil all the time. No one understands every aspect of the mysteries of our faith in Christ. We all have something—like dirt hardened in time of drought—that causes us to resist the gift of God's word, whether that be a complex or broken relationship, loneliness, concerns about health, the status of our investment portfolio or lack thereof, the socio-political makeup of our time, or feel free to fill in the blank. We each have something we could name.

For too long I think that the church—not Grace specifically, but the church as a whole—has been fixated on soil, happy to point out who is in and who is out, what kind of soil we want and what is simply, well, dirty. Truth be told, if we are all simultaneously saint and sinner, then each and every person who walks through those doors also has good soil waiting to be enriched by God's word and fed with the promises of new life in Christ's body and blood. Indeed, we all have all kinds of soil waiting for the work of the Holy Spirit to bring about a harvest that yields enough for this life and the next.

There is no denying that each of us has a unique mixture of these various kinds of soil; but each of these kinds of soil we all do have. To point out the rocky soil in someone else's life is simply to expose our own. Knowing that we are alike in this way, we become free from directing our fingers toward others or navel gazing at our own sin, if that is our tendency, and we realize that the gifts given to us in our baptism—new and everlasting life, communion with one another and with the triune God—those gifts are for all. In fact, sowing seeds to share these gifts with others becomes our vocation.

As the insurance jingle goes: "We Are Farmers – bum ba dum, dum dum dum dum!"

As the words of the prophet Isaiah remind us: God promised that his word would not return empty and that it would accomplish that which he purposed and succeed in the thing for which he sent it.

Truly, just as God spoke creation into being with a word and, by his living Word, Jesus, brought about our salvation on the cross, so too now does that word reach our ears, our minds, our hearts. As living members of the savior Christ, we become part of God's agricultural work for the sake of the world. Our souls are enriched here with the very body and blood of Christ and we go forth to serve, scattering like seed to do the work of ministry in our everyday lives. The means through which God's purposes are fulfilled in this world, dear church, is through you.

So let us not hoard the seed and save it only for good soil, the soil that we deem worthy, the kind that we think will be likely to sustain a large yield. The word of God is to be spread generously and lavishly. Let us, like the sower in the parable, drop some on the path, risk some on the rocky soil, and even give the thorns their chance. God, through giving the gift of his only Son, certainly took that chance on us. And, like that corn in my back yard, you never know where a harvest might pop up.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.