

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost, July 13, 2008, Year A, Proper 10

**St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector

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

***"Keep Spreading the News!"***

Wow – how time flies! It was three years ago this weekend that I stepped into this pulpit for the first time – as a member of the staff here at St. Bartholomew's. How ironic it is that this very same Gospel – taken from Matthew – is what I preach about three years later. Thanks be to God – three years may have passed, but the message and the Gospel have not changed. Three wonderful years can provide growth and insight – a deeper knowledge of God's plan for our lives – and it can also open our eyes to a painful truth that comes along with that Gospel.

Jesus sat in the boat and spoke to those who gathered to hear Him speak – and He told them the Parable of the Soils – which is also known as the Parable of the Sower. This remarkable parable reminds us that the Kingdom of God is an open invitation to anyone who is willing to receive it – whose heart has been prepared by the Holy Spirit – and is ready to repent and accept Jesus as Lord of their life. We as followers of Jesus Christ have the task of sowing the seed of the one true Gospel of Jesus Christ – which is the saving Grace of God through true repentance and forgiveness of our sins – through Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross.

**It is distressing that some never accept that invitation, or even worse still - only partially accept that invitation** – and they do so by plugging in their own truths instead of His. Just as the seed falls on different soils – so will His Gospel. Some of that seed will take root and flourish – while some will wither and die. It is the same with those who fail to fully see the truth and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord – that Jesus is God – and that we are sinners in need of Him as our Savior. That my friends, is the cold hard reality of it – that not everyone will be saved – many through their own unwillingness to see the truth or to accept the truth. I know this is not a fun thing to hear – and it can of course be horrifying to think that there are some who will not spend eternity with Jesus – and even worse still – knowing that there is nothing, absolutely nothing that we can do about it. While it is true that there is not one person here today that can save a soul – it is also true that each one of us is called to tell them the truth anyway! **We have got to keep spreading the news!** We are not supposed to fold up our tents and go home because we have no control over who goes to heaven or not – NO, instead we are to try even harder to sow the seed of truth – and to pray for the Holy Spirit to take root in their hearts. Giving up should not be a part of our vocabulary – and besides sowing the seed – we are called to nourish and help it to grow through witness, good example, and through patience and love. That's where the church as the Body of Christ comes in.

Sadly there are some people who think that simply praying a prayer will get you into heaven – or maybe answering an altar call will open the door to eternal life. These are indeed important and powerful steps toward knowing Jesus but they are all merely a part of that seed that is planted and which is broken open by the Holy Spirit to sprout and take life. What follows is most important in the life – *the eternal life* of any believer. Think of the 4 soils: the path, the rocky ground, the thorns, and the good soil. The environment, the life – the very heart of the believer - is the soil upon which its seed falls.

Just praying a prayer alone – will be like the seed falling upon the rocky soil – unless there is repentance and a willingness to submit to Jesus as Lord, trusting in Him for all things. That is called faith!

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost, July 13, 2008, Year A, Proper 10

But, if you are the same person, doing the same old things, the same behavior that you did before you met Jesus – then there has been no growth – no transformation – no root! Jesus said in Matthew 7:21 “*Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.*” A response is required – not just saying “YES Lord – I want to know you” but there is more that is required. We have to give Jesus the permission in our lives to change us – to transform us – to make us grow to be more like Him. That is called not just permission – *but submission* – to His Lordship. So let me ask you – are you are the same person, doing the same old things that you did before you met Jesus? I pray that you are not!

Spreading the Word of God is a charge that each and every believer was given when Jesus said “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.*” (Matthew 28:19-20) This Great Commissioning helps not only to spread the seed – but to help prepare the soil, to nurture the growth that God has enabled. The work of the people of God, His Holy Church, is to help water and feed those whom He has called and chosen to be His; those with “ears to hear” His message – to hear and understand the Word of God. Our response as His holy church; as onetime seedlings ourselves, is to bear the fruit of His love in mission to others.

In today’s Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 55:10-11 God reminds us that He expects to see the effects of His works: “*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*” God’s investment in you – in all of us – is the most costly of all – that of His Son, Jesus Christ. His expectation of us is costly as well –

- He expects us to give our all – our everything to Him –
- by not just calling Him Lord –
- but by treating Him as Lord.

When Jesus taught the Parable of the Talents – He told of the three people who were given talents –or money to care for and grow while he was away. Upon his return he found only two had invested wisely while the other buried his master’s money in the ground for safe keeping. The master addressed them not as servants – as is most often **translated incorrectly**. The Gospel uses the Greek word **δοῦλε** (*doolay*), a form of the word **δοῦλος** (*doolas*), **which means slave** and not servant. I do believe that this correctly illustrates the obedient relationship that we should seek with Jesus. He said: “*well done, **good and faithful slave**; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.*” (Matthew 25:23) How many of us have quoted that verse to others - not fully knowing the intent or context of its truth? We said: “Well done good and faithful servant!” **Jesus doesn’t want us to seek Him as our buddy – but as our Lord – our God.** When we **obediently and humbly seek Christ as Lord – it is then Jesus who can change that relationship** to one which becomes rather than slave but instead to brother or sister – and friend. In John’s Gospel Jesus says those very words to us “*I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.*” (John 15:15) **God calls those whom He has chosen – and God chooses the relationship – based on our**

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost, July 13, 2008, Year A, Proper 10

**faith in Jesus Christ.** The Apostle Paul puts it clearly in Galatians 4:7 *“Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.”* The playing field is not level

- nor is it ours –
- it is His – everything is His –
- and we should never forget that.

Once the seed is sown – the Body of Christ must assist in the growth of the seedling; and that my friends - is where all of us come in. And it is not just for the growth of others – but for our own growth as well. Coming to church on Sunday is a wonderful thing – but it doesn’t or shouldn’t end there. We are called to be in relationship with one another – spending time in God’s Word, sharing and praying with one another. Wednesday Eucharist, Men’s Fellowship, Women’s Fellowship, Beth Moore Bible Studies, Adult Sunday School, Sunday school, the Youth fellowship, The Young Adults, the Choir..., and believe me this could be a whole sermon in itself. I could go on and on. Let me give you an example: the youth spent the night in the Fr. Jones Youth Building Friday evening, sharing and examining the Gospel of Mark. They went to sleep thinking and digesting the Word of God. Awesome!

There is a wonderfully long list of ministries that we are blessed to have here at St. Bartholomew’s! It is truly encouraging that we have so many choices and opportunities to exercise the gifts that the Lord has given us – but chiefly for the fellowship and opportunity to let the light of Christ shine in us to one another and those around us. It is not just about the clergy ministering to you, but it is about you ministering to one another – using the blessings that Holy Spirit has bestowed upon you – for His Glory, for His Kingdom. Everything that we do and say as the Body of Christ has to do with the Good News – the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Listening to a person who needs to share, a word of encouragement, a prayer; that is spreading the Good News that Christ has given to you – being obedient to what He has commanded you to do. We are blessed to be in the good soil – and we must help to nurture those seeds who “pop up” along the way, by the grace of God, and help them to flourish and grow in Him – to bear fruit themselves. Keep spreading the news!

Next Saturday is a perfect example of that sharing and enrichment in the good soil. Our fourth Annual Rock, Rods, and Relationships will take place here at St. Bart’s from 2 to 8 PM. We are sharing the blessings of this good soil with our community – obediently reaching out with free food, with Christian music, with awesome classic cars, with fellowship, a healing Eucharist, worship, and the Word of God. I want to encourage all of you – my fellow seedlings, to come and be part of this ministry. I didn’t say WORK- (not unless you feel called to volunteer) but to come and enjoy the fellowship, and blessing of the Church community in which God has planted you. Along the way, we can help to guide others toward Jesus Christ – the Way, the Truth and the Life. He indeed is the narrow gate. Jesus told us in the Gospel of Matthew 7:13-14 *“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”* Keep spreading the News!