

*That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. 2Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. 3And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 5Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. 6But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. 7Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 8Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9Let anyone with ears listen!"*

*18"Hear then the parable of the sower. 19When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. 20As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. 22As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. 23But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."*

I was feeling so proud. The raspberries were the biggest I had ever grown, and abundant. A week ago I bought netting to cover the bushes so that now the birds don't harvest the crop just before I do.

So there I was, surrounded by red berries, delicious berries. My neighbor upon whose land I grow my berries usually has a small patch of berries, but this year my neighbor's raspberry plants were afflicted with some disease - not a berry has she picked. Thinking of this my berries tasted even more delicious. I was feeling so proud.

Suddenly I thought: what a fool. I did not send the rain, guard against disease, keep the Japanese beetles from stripping the plants. Thank God, I thought. And I did. I began to share the harvest.

I ask that you remember misplaced pride, and raspberries and giving thanks as you hear God's word and about God's word this morning.

"As the rain and 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 said "Let there be light." and there was light.

God said to Abraham, "I shall return to you in due season and your wife Sarah shall have a son. Isaac was born to the ninety year old Sarah and the one hundred year old Abraham.

God said to Pharaoh, "Let my children go." And after ten plagues Pharaoh did.

"My word shall not return to me empty but shall accomplish that which I intend."

"As a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ and by his authority I declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins."

Not an empty word, but God's word that accomplishes that which God purposes and succeeds in the thing for which God sends it.

"The body of Christ given for you, the blood of Christ shed for you."

No empty word, this is God's word.

But Jesus says, "Listen. A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears, listen."

You tell of Jesus. To one burdened by guilt you tell of the entire forgiveness of all of their sins in Jesus. And nothing grows. The word you speak is like seed tossed on a hardened path. It cannot penetrate. It is as if birds came and gobbled it up and flew away and there is no sign that the word was ever spoken.

Or you tell of Jesus, of abundant life and joy in him. She hears; faith grows almost immediately. She is all smiles and hugs and Jesus. She is here every free moment. All this new growth is startling. Then sorrow comes, a death in the family, or illness, or someone here speaks a harsh word, a word of judgement. As suddenly as it sprang up faith is withered. We see her no more.

They are here, active, involved. But slowly they drift away.

You say: "We miss you, has anything changed?"

"No, they've just been busy - busy with the kids activities, busy with travel, busy with the boat, busy with work, busy with the house or yard, busy on the golf course or tennis courts."

Busy, too busy to hear God's word anymore, too busy to give of themselves and serve. Christmas and Easter they are here - then not at all - the plant of faith choked off by the thorns of busyness.

And every one of them hoped to be bearing an abundant harvest of grain. The path people who never really heard, and the rocky soil people who were so full of enthusiasm for a time, the thorn people who slowly were choked by busyness. Every one of them hoped that they would be the one to bring forth a great harvest.

We all wish that God's word would make of us healthy, vibrant plant. We wish that there was the fruit of love in us that gave us joy in living, joy in giving, joy in serving. I wish that all of you would say of me, "My, what a person of faith!" What love, what compassion, what sacrificial giving is in him"

Do you know what would happen if you did say those things of me? Pride would choke out faith just the way ripe red berries caused pride to spring forth immediately.

"Let anyone with ears listen," says Jesus.

These words of Jesus are not spoken to our neighbors and for our neighbors but to us - to you - to me. You are the one in whom God's word finds a hardened path - you the one who sometimes hears the word and has the quickly growing and quickly withering excitement - you are the one threatened by the cares of the world and the lure of wealth - you are the one in whom God is producing an abundant harvest.

Listen!

And give thanks to God. For the thirty-fold harvest, and the sixty-fold, and for the hundred-fold harvest give thanks to God. If the berry patch of love in you is dotted with fruit this year while your neighbors patch is withering, give humble thanks. And pray for your neighbor - be gracious toward your neighbor.

And if faith is withering in you, being choked in you, snatched away from you, know that God's word does not return empty.

Listen! God's word will renew you and restore you and refresh you once more.

I'm sharing my raspberries now. I don't know what will be next year. Maybe my neighbor will be providing for me.

Certainly God provides for us all.