

**“The parable of the sewer”**  
**Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**  
**Brentwood First Presbyterian**  
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## Introduction

The first time you heard Jesus parable about the sewer, you probably thought it was about the soil. I know I did. Jesus sits in Peter’s fishing boat, in the style of many teachers of his day, and talks to the crowd on the shore of that 8 mile diameter fresh water lake, the Lake of Galilee. A lake fed by the northern Jordan river, and drained by the southern Jordan river. A warm fresh water lake teeming with the fish Tilapia and surrounded by a ribbon of deep, rich, moist soil. Jesus was always telling stories, illustrating theology with stories about agriculture. This was after all a community of farmers and fisher folk. This parable could be just about the soil. But there are other props and actors in the story. There is the sewer, the seed, and the fruit. For the next few minutes, imagine you are sitting on the shore with your family. Rich, loamy soil, listening to Jesus as he sits on Peter’s boat. Can you hear the lapping of the water on the boat? Can you see the birds flying overhead? Can you smell the soil at your feet? Can you hear the wind in the fields of grain behind you?

## Movement 1

A word about fruit. What is the fruit of which this parable speaks? I am going to ask you right now to turn to Galatians 5:22. The fruits of the spirit. Agape love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Paul tells us there is no law against these things. Those who belong to Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

A word about the seed: God’s seed, God’s word, is scripture, yes. But it is also the seed of truth proclaimed from the pulpit and in hymns during worship. It is the seed of truth heard from the mouths of those who pray out loud. It is the seed of truth heard in discussion of scripture in Bible study. It is also, and this is more subtle sometimes, God’s truth heard in the still quiet of our private prayers. Sometimes God’s truth is hard to catch, hard to hear, isn’t it? Because God’s truth is not always convenient. God’s seed is not always caught. And sometimes, the soil catches the seed, but it still bears no fruit.

## Movement 2

A word about the soil: At first pass, we think the soil describes the way certain people are all the time, don’t we. And we think that we ourselves are always that rich, deep, dark soil, don’t we? But if we think we are always receptive soil, we

are wrong, aren't we? In fact, we ARE sometimes that rich, deep, dark soil, that receives the word of God, receives the truth, and produces abundant fruit.

But sometimes, just ever now and then, the seeds of truth hit the surface of our souls and bounce off. Because we just are not listening. Or because we are hard-hearted or hard-headed. But more commonly, because God's seeds of truth are inconvenient. They hold a mirror up to us and show us we are not coherent with God's truth. God's seed of truth confronts us with our behavior or our attitude. When seed is thrown on compacted soil, like in the middle of a path, we cannot catch it. It is like trying to catch a baseball with stiff hands. The ball bounces out of your glove. You have to move your hand back when the ball hits your glove, and you have to close the glove around the ball, if you want to catch the baseball. When we hear a truth that confronts us with our incoherence, it is like trying to catch a ball with stiff hands instead of cherishing soft hands. The Russian short story writer Anton Chekhov once said, the falsehood that exalts, we cherish more than the meaner truths that are a thousand strong.

And sometimes, we catch the seed of God's truth, but because we are distracted, it is crowded out. We are distracted by our careers. We are distracted by our families. We are distracted by our self-centeredness. Our every day world, like thorns, crowds out God's seed so it does not produce fruit. Like the 5 year old child, we catch the baseball, then we drop it because we are distracted by the daisy. We catch the seed, but our distractions crowd it out.

And sometimes, we hear the seeds of God's truth, but they penetrate only down to but not through our soil and soul. Our souls are like rocky soil. The seeds of God's truth cannot send down roots into the inner recesses of our soul. We know the truth, but the truth does not permeate us. Our head knows the truth, but not our hearts. So we shake it off. Or we think we hear the truth, but that truth is perverted. We pervert the message of God's love, and think it is conditional. We either judge others or ourselves. We ignore the message of God's love for all of creation. That God's love is conditional on neither right creeds nor right deeds. God's love really is unconditional. So when bad things happen, we think God is punishing or instructing us. When in fact, when bad things happen, God is the first one to cry. That is good news, isn't it? That God is with us in thick and thin. Jesus tells us the Good News of the New Testament is that God's judgment is always mercy. But we are like the rocky soil, and we receive the seeds of God's truth, but the roots of the truth do not penetrate deeply so we cannot bear the fruit of God's Holy Spirit.

None of us is perfect. All of us fall short of the glory of God. Jesus does not ask us to say we love God and then do as we please. Jesus asks us to struggle with our temptations and try to do better.

Turn now to John 8:7. He said to the scribes and law-mongering Pharisees, "Let anyone who is without sin be the first one to throw a stone at her." Then he said

to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you." But did he say to her, "Love God and do as you please?" No, read with me from John 8:10, "Go your way, and from now on do not sin again." Jesus knows she will be tempted to sin again. For we all do that which we ought not and fail to do that which we ought. But he still admonishes the woman to straighten up and fly right. To keep her nose clean. Don't say you love God and flagrantly do as you please. Yes, all of us have in the past been unreceptive soil that produces fruit of judgmentalism, criticism, self-centeredness or hubris. Soil and souls that do not produce the fruit of God's Holy Spirit. But that was yesterday. God's Spirit is making in you today not just receptive soft soil and souls, but deep, dark, rich, soil and souls that produce abundantly the fruit of God's Holy Spirit. Yes, Jesus says God affirms us in the midst of our brokenness. But Jesus wants to mend our brokenness. Jesus says God transforms us. We are not the same persons we were before our transformation into deep, dark, fertile soil and souls.

### Movement 3

A word about the sewer. It appears God casts the seed indiscriminately on all soil. But I do not believe that is the case. I believe God does not cast the seeds of truth indiscriminately. Because God does not judge the soil before the seed is cast. God gives all the soils a chance. A chance to produce fruit. Sometimes God's seeds are not received by the soil at all. Sometimes God's seeds are received by the soil but crowded out. Sometimes God's seeds flourish for a while, but are perverted by the well meaning teaching of our past, and die out. All of us in the past have been hard headed and hard hearted. All of us in the past have been distracted. All of us in the past have perverted God's truth. Perverted it to judgmentalism, criticism, self-centeredness, or hubris. Yes, the description in this parable of the various kinds of soils convicts us. All of us. But that was yesterday. Jesus tells us in today's parable that today is the day God's word changes us. Today is the day God's word helps us turn over a new leaf. Today is the day God's word helps us catch the seed of God's truth. Today is the day God's word helps us let God's truth grow through the thorns and distractions of career, family, and self. Today is the day God's seeds of truth send down roots into our souls and penetrate us deeply. To go and struggle with our temptations, rather than flagrantly do as we please. Today is the day God's word helps us bear the fruits of God's Holy Spirit.

### Conclusion

All of us, at one time or the other, on our faith journey, are like the hard compacted soil, and do not catch the seed of God's truth. Because God's truth is inconvenient. All of us, in the past, are like the soil with thorns, are distracted by our every day life. Distracted by career, family, or our selfishness. Or the seed of God's truth is caught, but falls on rocky ground and its roots do not penetrate deeply. It does not bear the fruit of agape love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Instead, the seed of God's truth bears the fruit of judgmentalism, criticism, self-centeredness, or hubris.

But today is a new day. Today is the day we catch the seeds cast by God. Today is the day the roots of those seeds finally grab hold of our souls. Today is the day.

Glory be to God, Hallelujah, and all God's children say ...