

It Is No Secret
Mathew 13:1-23

Imagine for a moment that you were part of that large crowd that gathered on the shore that day to hear Jesus preach. Earlier in the day you would have seen Him heal a demon-possessed man, all the while wondering how such a thing could be possible. A short while later you would have witnessed a heated discussion Jesus had with the scribes and Pharisees about the kingdom of God and the deadly consequences of blaspheming the Holy Spirit of God, two things that border on inexplicable. All of that before lunchtime! Now you are standing on the seashore, listening to His second or perhaps third sermon of the day and thankfully this time Jesus is talking about something much easier to understand, gardening. Even those of us with little knowledge of sowing and reaping understood the basics of what He said. It remains a mystery how God turns a tiny little seed into a great big plant, but it is no secret that seeds need good soil to do so.

Like hundreds of times before, Jesus words to the crowds that day centered upon the primary reason you and I are here right now; to worship and grow in our love of God. The two are inseparable, we cannot expect to do one without the other. God created us to worship. In fact, the more we worship God, specifically worship God in spirit and truth, the more we will love God. An added benefit is that the more we love God, the more we will love each other.

Said another way, worship is the good soil that helps us to grow and mature into the loving people God desires us to be. Though spiritual growth can and does take place in solitude, something special happens when a group of people, large or small, come together to glorify and worship God. It is a challenge for us to do that at the moment, yet we have found new ways to make it possible. At one time, fellowship only meant greeting one another, catching up on things that have changed since we last met, or perhaps having a plate of food and discussing what God is doing in our lives. Social distancing may keep us from doing those things, but we can remain connected through other means.

True Christian fellowship has a spiritual component to it. Many of us spend so much time during the week with people who do not have a relationship with Christ that we just need to be with others who think and believe like we do. We need relief from the struggles and hardships of life, we need some special time together with God and each other so that we can leave here renewed and ready to face the challenges that life in this earthly world bring. If we are to grow spiritually, both individually and as a church, some planning will help us accomplish it.

Spiritual growth involves planning, preparation, and recognizing the things that can get in the way- the things that stunt our growth. Jesus used the parable of the soils to illustrate to the crowds that day how that can happen. The seed that fell by the wayside was gobbled up by the birds. We know that if we are planting grass seed in our yard and some lands on the concrete driveway or the sidewalk or the road, it cannot grow. The idea is that sometimes the wind carries the seeds to places where it cannot germinate and grow, places too hard for the seed to penetrate. It is the same way with our spiritual growth- we cannot allow things- or people- to carry us to places that harden our hearts. I will allow you to decide what those places might be.

The seed that fell on rocky soil is similar. There was just enough dirt and moisture to allow it to sprout, but there was not enough to sustain it. The soil was not deep enough for the roots to take hold. The idea here is that some people make a commitment to Christ, but when the going gets tough and things donot work out like they think they should they return to their old ways.

Then there is the seed that falls on good ground. It begins to grow tall, but soon the weeds come and steal the sunlight, moisture, and nutrients it needs to grow. The principle here is that the things of the world- money, pleasure and all the rest, can steal what we need to grow in Christ.

Those are some of the things that can stunt our spiritual growth- ignoring God's call, a lack of commitment and allowing the false pleasures of the world to steal the real joy we have in Christ.

So, if we want to grow in our faith, what positive things can we do? At the top of the list should be regular prayer. Prayer is communication with God. To develop a relationship with anyone, we must be able to communicate. A lack of communication will dissolve any relationship, spiritual or earthly. Think about our church family. I am sure you'll agree that you are a lot closer to someone you talk to on a regular basis, rather than someone you see once or twice a year. It is the same way with God. If you are not spending time in fellowship and communication with God, rather than just asking for things when the need arises, your relationship will suffer.

The next thing is to spend time with God in Holy Scripture. If you do not spend time in God's Word, you are not as close to Him as you could be. Of course, we also need to understand what is written. One way to do that is think about how the words and basic principles found there can apply to your life. If you do that, you will begin to develop a special love for what God has written for us. And those principles will soon turn into actions.

So far, we have prayer and Scripture in our plans. But there are times when we need more. There are times when we need help because we cannot go it alone. We need help. Just as a friend can make an unpleasant task more fun a helping hand can make things go much smoother. The point is that Christian fellowship can help us to grow when we are experiencing those times when life seems to be crashing in around us. Our time together, including Sunday worship and other occasions throughout the week, all help to build our relationship with God and understand what He asks of us.

It is these three things: Prayer, Scripture, and Fellowship, that allow us to grow and mature in our faith. Once we have understood what God requires of us, we can begin to submit to His will. This is where we begin to grow spiritually.

With prayer, Scripture, and Christian community, and Christ's help we cannot fail. Let us apply this parable to our lives and see what kind of soil we are in. If need be, pray that God will transplant you to more fertile ground. Maybe we may need to do some weeding. Whatever it takes, let us be intentional as we seek to grow in faith. Amen