

Sexagesima, 2006

Text: Luke 8:4-15

Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL

Pastor H. R. Curtis

XGrace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ X

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And after five days of preparing the universe to receive his most precious creation, the Lord God took the dirt of the ground and made Adam and from his side Eve. Thus from the beginning we have been dust – and to dust we shall return. For humans are made from the humus, earthlings from the earth, as is clear from Adam's name (for the Hebrew for dirt is adamah).

So it should come as no wonder that Jesus today compares all people to dirt. But there is something powerful lurking behind this choice of words. For what does Scripture say about the ground? Hear the Word of the Lord to Adam after he sinned,

"17 And to Adam he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.'"

Yes, cursed is the ground. There are now thorns and thistles, and bugs and blights, and thus famine and disease, war and bloodshed, sorrow and pain. Cursed is this earth indeed. For sin brings death and all that leads to death. This is no surprise to you. For have you too are human, a descendant of Father Adam, Father Dirt. And have you not seen in your own life the cursed soil of which Jesus speaks today? How can the seed of his Word find a place to grow in a heart hard with a grudge held against friends or family for months or years? How long will the seed grow in your heart so rocky with the latest gossip about the downfall of your neighbor? Will the seed be scorched in the shallow soil of your heart, which one day feels close to God and the next day runs after your lusts and desires? How long will the seed hold out against your heart's choking weeds of busy

schedules, family pressures, and worldly desires?

Therefore repent – turn away from any hope in yourself – for there is none. But turn toward the man in the parable for there is yet a surprise up his sleeve. For behold, there is some good soil where the seed can grow. Where did that come from? I thought the ground was cursed? Yes – but the Lord said it would yield a crop if the man worked it by the sweat of his brow.

And in this parable the Man sowing the seed is the Second Adam. The one who for us men, for us sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, and for our salvation came down from heaven and was made Man, was made the new Adam. This Jesus Christ is the Man who tills the field and makes it ready to receive him. For this Jesus Christ is not just the Man, but also the Word of the Lord – the Word made flesh – who will not return to the Father empty, but will accomplish the purpose for which he was sent.

And what was that purpose? Nothing other than your salvation. For watch how the Man makes the ground yield a crop by the bloody sweat of his brow. Watch as the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world as a thorn of crowns is fixed to his brow. Watch him labor of the cross planted in the dead soil of Golgotha. Watch as his own dead body is planted in the tomb, only to sprout forth again on Eastern morning. And then watch all things become new. Watch new life pour out of him and into you.

For like any farmer, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ comes to the ground as he finds it with two tools: water and plant food. Worried that your heart is hard, dry, rocky soil? Fear not – for the Lord Jesus Christ took care of that, softening it with the life-giving irrigation of baptism. Like water in a parched land this gift of baptism life to you. For what is baptism? Not just any old bath, but a washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit. It's not just some religious ceremony – it is a divine and miraculous reality. For baptism is the water combined with God's Word and connected to God's command. The Word of God is living and active – and it comes to our bodies and souls in holy baptism. The ground, the humus, of humanity once cursed in Adam's fall and made dry and hard is rejuvenated, regenerated, remade in the waters of Holy Baptism. This is your gift Christian. This is how Jesus made you good soil.

Thus when those birds of Satan come to snatch away the seed, they shall not be able to do so. For your seed sits not on the hard path, but is has found a soft bed of dirt prepared by the waters of Baptism. Thus did Luther famously cry out when attacked by the devil, "I am baptized." Case closed. The devil has no authority to do spiritual harm to those baptized into

Christ. You are not of his kingdom anymore. You belong to Christ and no one can snatch you from his hand.

But as the seed takes root in your heart of good soil, made so by Jesus' irrigation of baptism, there is still danger. For there is still the threat of those weeds and those rocks. The cares of this world and your own lingering sinful desires will seek to deprive your growing faith of nourishment. But never fear, for the Lord Jesus has seen to that as well. For a good farmer tends his field not only with water, but also with plant food.

And thus does the Lord feed you. And if the Seed is the Word, and if the Word made flesh is Jesus and if it is Jesus' Name into which you are baptized, does it come as any surprise that the food is also Jesus himself, indeed his very body and blood? What else can keep a Christian alive – whose only Life is Christ – except Christ's own self? And so Jesus lovingly distributes from this table the fruits of his cross in this miraculous meal. For this plant food is the true Miracle Grow. For once again by the power of his Word what was once bread and wine is now, by a miracle, his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins, for the strengthening of our faith, for our growth in our Life, which is He Himself.

Was there ever a farmer who took such care for his crop? Was there ever a farmer who gave more of himself to see to it that what he sowed grew to fruition? Dear Christians, rejoice and sing with the Psalmist – for the Lord of the Harvest has truly planted his Word deep within you and has provided the means to make sure that it grows – even Himself. Come forward now to receive Him again.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

X

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

X

Pr. H. R. Curtis

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"But with a man who belongs to an everlasting kingdom all is well and it is fitting that he should dance through life forevermore."

- Martin Luther
(1544)