

The Parable of the Sower
Mark 4:1-20

Friends if you happened to watch the People's Choice Awards this past month you might have heard comedian Adam Sandler pay tribute to all his influential teachers – and while he couldn't recall their names he did remember their little idiosyncrasies...like his kindergarten teacher, the nice short lady with weird glasses.

I'm sure we all have memories of a teacher who, for one reason or another, sticks out for us – and hopefully one of those reasons is that they were a terrific teacher who inspired and helped us really get into the study of history, math or science – even English...

In fact, when the late author John Steinbeck turned down a dinner invitation from a U.S. President in order to attend a dinner in honor of his former English teacher, he said that in his life he had met five great Presidents but only one great English teacher.

Friends, I think we all know that **having a great teacher can make such a huge difference in our lives**. If a teacher is able to get us excited about learning and education and inspire us to apply ourselves – well that can open all kinds of doors for us in life.

And this is why people will often remember and thank the teachers who've inspired them when they receive awards and accolades for their success later on in life.

And friends I know that a great many people today would extend that kind of honor to Jesus as well, saying that He was perhaps the greatest religious teacher our world has ever known and that He has inspired millions of people to love God... and their neighbors.

But as we are spending time with Jesus, walking alongside him in the gospel of Mark this morning, we observe Jesus teaching in a way that somewhat tarnishes, perhaps even contradicts his reputation as a great teacher.

He teaches through parables which are intended to obscure his message and keep people away?

He says *“to those on the outside everything is said in parables¹² so that, “they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!”*”

What is going on here?

Well friends – there’s nothing wrong with wanting to give honor to Jesus... but Jesus didn’t come to be honored as a teacher.

Jesus didn’t come to inspire people to study spiritual or religious matters; Jesus didn’t come to develop and spin off new ideas about God or to simply confirm what everyone already knew.

He came to announce the Kingdom of Heaven had arrived in his person and that the power of Satan was broken – the healings and deliverance demonstrated this. As we’ve said

before Jesus was “The Chosen One” who would defeat evil and make everything right again.

And “the Chosen One” does need to do some teaching about himself and his mission... but lest we mistake Jesus for merely a great teacher...Jesus teaches in parables.

Now maybe you’ve heard a thing or two about parables before – that they are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning... or that they are a type of analogy which gets across a point... but friends let me ask you a question?

When was the last time you took a course and the teacher used the “parabolic” method with you?

If you are a teacher – when was the last time you felt that it would be helpful to explain a rather difficult concept you were trying to teach by telling a parable?

Friends the parable is not really a great teaching device – but Jesus uses it because He has no intention of allowing the crowds to mistake him for a great teacher.

Socrates was a great teacher – and many teachers today still use the Socratic Method to help their students learn and retain information. But Jesus isn't interested in helping people discover new information and effectively retain it.

Jesus is interested in seeing people released from Satan's grip, destroying the influence of the devil in their lives; – so that they are free to give their loyalty to Jesus as Lord instead, and teaching in Parables is an excellent way to identify those to whom this is happening.

You see friends crowds will always be crowds. If you go out and do good things for people, help people, meet their needs... you will always attract attention, and a following – and Jesus has done that, but Jesus has more in mind than just attracting a crowd.

So he gets out in a boat a little ways away from the shoreline and he teaches them many things... *in parables*. He teaches not to impart information or inspire, but to identify those who are being renewed. Jesus wants to see who is experiencing the

Spirit of God working in their hearts as he demonstrates God's power through healings, deliverance and forgiveness.

So when he has finished he ends by saying - He who has ears to hear...let him hear. It's an indirect way of saying "If God's Spirit is working in your heart to free you... then you'll be drawn to *me* through what I'm saying." and to say it directly like this instead of indirectly... well that just wouldn't work the same way would it?

You see while the content of a parable is obviously important, it's **the person who's telling the parable that is ultimately the focus** – the content of an effective parable is often deliberately obscure, almost like a riddle... so that the listener is compelled to approach the one who tells it in order to understand what they meant to communicate through it.

And to that extent the **content of the parable also needs to be somewhat offensive**, so that the person telling the parable knows that those who approach to hear an explanation have come in spite of hearing something that would otherwise push them away – it authenticates their interest.

I wonder how many people in the crowd on the shore listening to Jesus tell parables thought “What a stupid story! I came out to hear what this guy had to say for himself, and all he can say is ‘A farmer went out to sow some seeds...’ How is that relevant to my life? Let’s go... I’m getting hungry.

Most people probably thought Jesus’ story was rather stupid, after all what kind of farmer just randomly throws his precious seed around, it’s rather obvious that you need good soil for seed to grow. What is the point of this story they wonder? It’s pointless they conclude – let’s go.

But some people stuck around – because they were drawn to the one who told the parable. “He must mean something by it” they think – but what? And so we see that when the crowds had left, *“the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables.”*

And without realizing it they have just demonstrated that they are the good soil which receives the seed and the rest of the crowd and the teachers of the law have shown themselves to be

the hardened path, the shallow soil, and the soil choked with weeds.

Friends, Jesus tells the **Parable of the Sower to illustrate the nature of his work** and how he intends to go about accomplishing it. To show that He has not come to be a great teacher, but that He is the One who has come to defeat evil and make things right and He is looking for those who can recognize who He really is.

It’s about finding the good ground – the only way to do it is to throw the seed out and see what happens just like the farmer in the parable. Because in reality its not so evident who truly gets that Jesus is the one and who is just hanging around out of curiosity looking for excitement. Jesus tells parables to elicit faith in Him as the One.

But it’s not just so that Jesus can figure out who is on board and who is not, it also for the benefit those who are intrigued - because in approaching Jesus they are learning they need to go to him for what they seek.

They are compelled to seek Jesus for an explanation, only He can reveal what He intended to communicate by telling this parable. They may have their speculations or guesses or their own opinions... but only Jesus can reveal the meaning he intended.

They must accept his meaning, submit to his explanation and in this **they begin to experience Jesus as Lord.**

And friends, this is what Jesus wants us to know about him – actually I should rephrase that...it's what Jesus wants us to experience with him – that He is our Lord, not our teacher.

You know, given what we saw happen to Jesus last week – where his family thought he was crazy and the religious authorities accused him of black magic, combined with what we see about Jesus teaching methods this week I can't help but think of what C.S Lewis once said about Jesus....

“a man who was merely a man and said [and did] the sorts of things Jesus said [and did] would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with a man who says

that He is a poached egg – or else He would be the Devil of Hell, You must make your choice... either this man was, and is, the Son of God [the ONE] or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any of this patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us... He did not intend to!”

Liar, lunatic or Lord, friends – those are our options... and Jesus teaches in parables to draw those to himself who would call him Lord.

And the Parable of the Sower indicates that those who respond to the good news and call Jesus Lord produce results- they yield a return of thirty, sixty, even a hundred percent.

Friends when we submit to Jesus and call him our Lord...it impacts our lives and the lives of others around us in a way that no teacher ever could. When Jesus teaches us in parables we are being moved from outside to being inside God's Kingdom,

we have not been educated – we have been forgiven! **We have not been inspired – we are transformed.**

Friends I've heard so many people share the results of submitting to Jesus as Lord I don't know where to start...

I've seen hardened criminals who've robbed banks and done time break down and cry like a baby. I've known alcoholics who became sober, I've seen people filled with rage become calm, people with mental illness find wholeness, and marriages that were failing suddenly flourish, families that were torn apart by sexual abuse forgive and reconcile...

And I know people who have changed from having their identity wrapped up in their accomplishments to being content with who they were, no longer driven – and I could go on.

And friends, don't be fooled by these amazing transformations. When I first met these people they looked like we all do from the outside.

They seemed to be nice normal people – and I'm sure they all had a teacher who had inspired them in their life – but under the surface and behind closed doors that inspiration hadn't prevented their criminal activity, their addiction, their anger...

For that they needed the Lord – The ONE – they needed Jesus who set them free from the power of Sin and Devil and brought them into the Kingdom of Heaven.

And I can tell you that although I grew up in the church – I looked and acted like any other teenager – but when I called Jesus Lord it my attitude and feelings towards Jesus changed from ambivalent to passionate, I went from feeling guilty to feeling forgiven! And to my parents' relief it also resulted in teachers finally being able to inspire me to learn☺

You see friends, and you know this, right? That, those who call Jesus Lord – their lives change and begin to yield results – **thirty, sixty... one hundred percent different than before.** And just like people give thanks to inspirational teachers we need to give credit to Jesus for how our lives have changed.

So now we become the farmer in Jesus Parable - sowing our experiences of how life changed with Jesus as Lord with anyone and everyone in our community who will listen.

And with some people it will simply go in one ear and out the other, other's will listen politely but their hearts are hard and it won't take root, still other's are simply too distracted by their busy schedules and the demands of life, but some....

Some will listen- to how our lives have changed and they will reconsider Jesus as a great teacher – perhaps he is something more...they will be drawn to Jesus as their Lord, and well... you know what happens from there! Thirty, sixty, one hundred percent difference.

And friends the good news is that when they sow their experience of transformation – maybe this time someone who was too distracted will finally take notice, someone who's heart was hard will soften up, or maybe it will go in one ear and stay there – take root and grow.

And so that stupid little story about a farmer which Jesus told to the crowd while standing in a boat, those many years ago continues to draw people to Jesus – bringing them to faith, enabling them to call him...LORD and changing their lives.

No teaching method could do that.

You see friends... I've known many great teachers – but there's only one Lord. Jesus Christ the master of the parable. Amen.