

Message for January 28, 2018

"A Measure of Love" <sup>i</sup>

Matthew 13: 1-9 -- <sup>1-3</sup> *At about that same time Jesus left the house and sat on the beach. In no time at all a crowd gathered along the shoreline, forcing him to get into a boat. Using the boat as a pulpit, he addressed his congregation, telling stories.*<sup>3-8</sup> *"What do you make of this? A farmer planted seed. As he scattered the seed, some of it fell on the road, and birds ate it. Some fell in the gravel; it sprouted quickly but didn't put down roots, so when the sun came up it withered just as quickly. Some fell in the weeds; as it came up, it was strangled by the weeds. Some fell on good earth, and produced a harvest beyond his wildest dreams. <sup>9</sup> "Are you listening to this? Really listening?"*

Prayer:

1. I am certain that many of you are saying – didn't Pastor Dick just use this Scripture recently? And the answer is yes – Last week – January 21, 2018 for our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I feel that we need to unpack this scripture more.
2. And **No** this is not a recycled message. Today, we will look at a totally different twist to the same Scripture passage that we looked at last week.
3. A parable of Jesus has many dimensions to it and today, with the Parable of the Sower, we will look at it as criteria of measuring our life.
4. **Before we start – I would like you to write down one four letter word on your bulletin – take a moment and get a pen or pencil – borrow one if necessary – write down the word "LOVE" --- we will see how this will become a measure of our life. Take a moment here.**
5. Show the measuring tools that we use: tape, meat thermometer, tire gage, measuring cup – and a scale --- all of these are important in our lives. They help us determine how to do a job, the quality of our tires, the proper amount of ingredients in a recipe and our body weight.
6. But do we have a way of measuring our life? Most of us are not sure how to measure the success or failure of our life. Do we just amble and drift along in life reacting to each situation on face value without much forethought or plan? Wandering through life causes us to casually take different directions and we

may realize, one day, that we really are not happy and very discontented with our life – and it may be too late to make any changes to our lot. – **or** do we have a plan that will help us determine if our life.

7. Have you ever gone to a school reunion – high-school or college – or some gathering of friends and acquaintances that you have not seen in many years? What have you seen?
  - a. Well initially –if it has only been several years since high school or college – everyone is on a path (a perceived path) towards happiness and fulfillment. Life is good --- the job is growing --- maybe some of your friends have gotten married and many are in a job and becoming more content and satisfied. The priorities are clear --- a job, a family, a house and more stuff—very seldom is God in the picture.
  - b. But then a few years latter – at the next reunion --- things have changed – life has gotten more complex – maybe children have come along or the job is more demanding or other family issues have taken over.
  - c. Several years later – maybe a divorce and second marriage has happened and now the job is even more demanding.
  - d. After 10 or 15 years you find that your friends and acquaintances have begun to question about their lives – am I fruitful? – what am I doing that is important? Should I change jobs? Should I change spouses? Should I buy a bigger house or a more expensive car? Ever think this way?
  - e. It today's society – and for the most of human history – we measure our life by how much money we have – a lot of money – we say we are successful – a little money – we say that we are not so successful. A lot of money we say means power – a little money says we have less power – there is a hierarchy – more money – top of the heap – less money – middle or bottom of the heap.
  - f. Power and money has an addictive quality to it. We gravitate to this measure of success and life.

- g. And people in the ministry are not immune to this addictive quality – we measure our success by church attendance – how many people have been saved? – Have we paid our apportionments – what is the better appointment? – and so on>
- h. Think about this as a measure of our life – where do we fit?
8. Okay --- let's now look at today's Scripture from Matthew.
9. One of Jesus' most remembered parables is often called the Parable of the Sower, though it is perhaps better called the Parable of the Soil....It is a parable about how we will measure our lives. In it Jesus uses soil, planting and harvesting crops to describe what he sees in people.
- 10. We're all like one of the soil types Jesus describes. The soils represent the condition of our hearts, how we respond to the good news of the Kingdom he proclaimed.**
11. Jesus said some people's hearts are like the **hardened soil** on the path. It has been walked upon, and is so packed and hard that any seed, any message of the good news of the Kingdom of God cannot penetrate the heart. Know anyone like that?
12. Some have **shallow soil**. In the Israel, this is what you often find—a thin layer of soil covering limestone and rock. The seeds sprout, but the roots don't go deep, and when the sun comes, or the winds blow, the sprouts are destroyed because they could not put down deep roots. I think of many people who receive the message of God's love, who say they have been saved, who may even join a church, but who quickly fall away when trouble comes because their faith never went any deeper than the surface, a kind of superficial faith. I have seen this in the Walk to Emmaus – where people have a transformational experience of the Holy Spirit – and then they rest and do nothing to strengthen and deepen the movement of the Holy Spirit. I see this are the Westminster Rescue Mission – men work on recovery – say that they have received Jesus – have been saved – but the roots are shallow and soon they relapse and go back on drugs and alcohol. Shallowness really destroys the working of the Holy Spirit.
13. Now **third**,

14. Some people, Jesus noted, **are like the soil which is covered in weeds, thistles and thorns.** These, Jesus says, represent the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth. So the gospel takes root in their lives, but the cares of the world and the desire for wealth choke out the gospel. **Remember the story about the rich young ruler? Go and sell everything and give it to the poor and then follow me. He could not do it because he was so attached to his wealth.**
15. And finally:
16. There's the **good soil**, the heart that welcomes the good news Jesus preached about the Kingdom of God. People trust Jesus, they join his mission, they seek to follow him and to do God's work in the world. They grow deeper in their faith and they have an impact on the world, bearing fruit, producing a harvest. Wheat stalks come to mind—one seed sown produces a stalk with 30, or 60, or 100 seeds.
17. **We're meant to measure our life by the harvest we produce....**let's talk about measuring our lives by the **love** that we give...The harvest realized by LOVE.
18. In John's gospel, Jesus picks up the theme of the harvest again. In John 15:8—the Parable about the Vineyards, Jesus says: "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."
19. What does this fruit look like that we're meant to bear? Jesus defines it in verse 12-13: **"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."**
20. **Love** is the measure of our life. You just wrote this down on the bulletin. The scriptures teach, and Jesus repeatedly reaffirms, that the ultimate measure of our lives is who and what we love. In our pew Bible – the New International Version of the Bible --the word "love" appears 686 times.
- a. Most often the Bible uses love to speak of one's highest priority or deepest loyalty. Hence we're to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

- b. This love is not a romantic feeling, and while it may include a deep affection, the love for God is **prioritizing God above all else**.
  - c. Most often in the Bible love means something more than feelings, and even prioritizing—it means seeking the good of the other, practicing kindness towards them, seeking to bless them.
  - d. The word in the Greek New Testament is AGAPE.
  - e. When we're called to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, the scripture is not talking about feelings, but a way of living in which we seek the good of the other person.
21. We're meant to demonstrate this love towards our family, children, spouses, parents, and siblings. The Bible calls us to demonstrate agape to our neighbors, our fellow believers, our co-workers and even enemies.
22. But our first priority, after our love for God, is to love those he has entrusted to our care—our family... and we do give thanks for friends and family in spite of the difficulties we may have.
23. Here is a true story. On last week, a friend told Adam Hamilton that he and his wife were going to try to get tickets to the fifth game of the World Series. There were still several thousand tickets. They were beginning to buy the online tickets when his daughter interrupted him. He and his wife both have important jobs serving others, and it's rare they are both home with the kids on the same night. Their eighth-grade daughter said, "Dad, you and mom are hardly ever home the same night. I was really hoping maybe tonight we could sit at home and watch the World Series together. I understand if you decide not to do that and go to the game. I just wanted to ask."
24. Wow – a wakeup call --In another year or so that request may not come. They left the World Series for another year, and stayed home and watched the game with their daughter. Their decision made a statement, **not by word but in action**, of their love for their daughter. The parents began to walk the talk instead of just talking the talk – Love in action.

25. Having delivered many funeral eulogies, I've sat with spouses, parents and children of the deceased as they tell me about their loved ones. I hardly ever hear these persons devote much time to talking about their loved one's professional life. Seldom do I hear "Joe or Jane really wished they had spent more time at the office." Being on the job is not what people celebrate. Those who've left the greatest impact on their families and on others were not necessarily the richest or the most successful as the world defines success. **They are always the ones who loved their family well. They invested in their family, poured into them, and loved them well with hundreds of acts of kindness, encouragement and support.**
26. These acts of kindness and love start with the family, but they don't end there. Love is meant to be the defining quality of the Christian life. We're called to love our neighbor, to love our enemy, to love in words and deeds, to love those who need our help, to love those who are brothers and sisters in Christ....
27. As you leave, I will give you a small slip of paper. Here's what I want to encourage you to do: take it with you, and put it in your pocket each day....Be intentional about practicing three acts of love this week. One act in which you seek to show kindness, offer encouragement or share your faith with another person by which they experience love. Even if we each only practiced one act of selfless love towards our family, towards our neighbors, towards our enemies every several days – can you imagine the impact?
28. Tell the story about Verizon and my cell phone.
29. **You will hear this message today. You can do the math. How many people will we as a congregation encourage, bless and bear witness to in the week – over 100 acts of love.**
30. This week, prayerfully consider your attitude toward "unlovable" people in your church, your family and at work. It's not easy, but ask God to help you change your attitude and find ways, even small ways, to serve them. Fill out the paper slip and put it in the offering plate.
31. Thanks be to God.

32. Prayer: Lord Jesus, keep me connected to you today and every day. Let me be a channel through which your divine love can flow freely to bless the lives of other people around me. Amen

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<sup>i</sup> Paraphrased from The Church of the Resurrection, November 2014