

Sermon on Matthew 13:1–23 “What Kind of Soil Am I Today?” July 12th 2026

When I volunteered as a paramedic, colleagues asked me the same question over and over again. *"Why are you studying theology? Why not medicine? Or science?"*

They weren't trying to be rude. They were curious. They understood why I wanted to help people. But they couldn't understand why I chose theology.

So I would try to explain that people need more than healthy bodies. We also have wounds that no X-ray can detect. We need hope just as much as we need healing. We need forgiveness just as much as we need medicine. Some people nodded and said, *"Now I understand."*

Others looked at me as if I were speaking a completely different language. I could have explained it for another hour, and they still wouldn't have understood. Maybe you've had moments like that. You try to explain why something matters to you. Why you're sad. Why you're excited. Why you come to church. Why your faith gives you strength. And the other person simply says, *"I just don't get it."* Or think about helping a child with math homework. To the adult, the answer seems so obvious. *"It's easy! Just do this!"* But the child stares back with a puzzled look. They simply don't understand. And then, years later, everything changes. Now it's your grandchild explaining your smartphone. Or your child showing you how to use a new app. To them, it's obvious. To you, it's like learning a foreign language. It isn't because one person is smarter than the other. It's because we all come with different experiences, different backgrounds, and different ways of seeing the world. And I think that's exactly what Jesus is talking about today.

Jesus tells a story about a farmer who goes out to sow seed. Some seed falls on the path. Some falls on rocky ground. Some falls among thorns. And some falls on good soil. The seed is always the same. The farmer is always the same. Only the soil changes.

As I prepared this sermon, I thought about something that challenges me. In German, we usually use one word: **Boden**. But in English, there are several different words.

There's **ground**—the surface we stand on. There's **floor** and there's **soil**. In German, we often use the same word for all three. English reminds us that not all ground is the same. Some ground is hard. Some is rocky. Some is covered with weeds. Some is rich and fertile. And people are just as different. Jesus isn't talking about one kind of soil. He's talking about many kinds of soil.

When we hear this parable, we often ask, *"Am I good soil or bad soil?"* But I don't think that's Jesus' main question. Maybe the better question is: **"What kind of soil am I today?"**

Because our hearts don't stay the same. There are days when we are open. We hear a Bible verse, and it feels as though God is speaking directly to us. The words comfort us. They encourage us. They give us hope. And then there are other days. We hear the very same Scripture. Nothing happens. Not because God's Word has become weaker. But because our hearts are in a different place. Maybe you've experienced that. You read a Bible passage. Nothing. A year later you read the exact same words. Suddenly tears fill your eyes. The Bible didn't change. God didn't change. You changed. The soil became different.

The same is true throughout our lives. There are seasons when we have energy. We're learning. We're growing. We're excited. And then there are seasons when we're exhausted. When we're grieving. When illness takes our strength. When worry fills our minds. During those times, God's Word falls on tired soil. That doesn't mean God has stopped speaking. It simply means we are human. We also change with age. As children we absorb new things quickly. During our working years, life becomes busy. When we're raising families, there never seems to be enough time. As we grow older, our bodies change. We move more slowly. We forget things. We can't do everything we once could. But that doesn't mean we become less fruitful. Sometimes the greatest fruits grow later in life. Patience. Wisdom. Gentleness. Trust. Not every harvest looks the same.

There's something else this parable teaches us. Not everyone grows in the same way. Some people meet God in music. Others in silence. Some people like me encounter God while being

out in the nature. Others while studying Scripture. Others while serving their neighbors. Sometimes we assume that what nourishes our faith should nourish everyone else's faith. But God created us differently. In fact, what looks like thorns to one person may become fertile soil for another. Some people need quiet. Others need conversation. Some pray best alone. Others find God surrounded by community. God knows every heart. God knows every kind of soil. And God knows exactly what each of us needs.

Here is an example: Last Sunday we had a visitor in worship. Before the service he spoke with me several times and kept calling me, "*Misses*." Perhaps he had never met a woman pastor. Perhaps he simply couldn't imagine that the person leading worship and preaching would be a woman. I didn't correct him. I simply led the service. After worship he came back to me. This time he smiled and said, "*Thank you, Pastor*." Just one word had changed. But that one word told a story. It said less about me than it said about him. Something had changed during that hour. Maybe it was the sermon. Maybe it was the music. Maybe it was the liturgy. Maybe it was simply seeing a woman proclaim the Gospel. I don't know. But I believe the Holy Spirit was at work. I believe the Gospel we heard that morning fell on fertile soil. Not because I convinced him. But because God changes hearts.

That also takes a burden off our shoulders. We all know people who don't understand our faith. People we wish could see what we see. People we love. Sometimes it feels as though nothing we say makes a difference. But Jesus never tells us to change people's hearts. That isn't our job. Our calling is simply to scatter the seed. God takes care of the growth.

And that's exactly what the farmer does. He sows generously. He doesn't save the seed only for the best soil. He doesn't say, "*That person isn't worth it*." He scatters everywhere.

What a beautiful picture of God's grace. God never gives up on anyone. Not the doubter.

Not the skeptic. Not the person whose heart has become hard. Not the one whose life is overrun with worries. Not even the one who believes they are beyond God's reach. God keeps sowing. Again and again. Day after day. Year after year.

Maybe today you don't feel like good soil. Maybe you're tired. Maybe you're worried. Maybe you're carrying grief. Maybe you're wondering whether God's Word can still reach you. Then hear this good news: This parable is not a story of judgment. It is a story of hope. Because the most important character in the story is not the soil. It is the sower. It is God. God keeps coming. God keeps sowing love, grace, forgiveness, and hope. God sees possibilities where we see only dry ground. God never stops believing that new life can grow. And God is patient. Patient with you. Patient with me. Patient with all of us. Because sometimes a seed needs time. Sometimes a heart needs time. But God's love never stops sowing.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.