

Sermon, August 16, 2020

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8; Galatians 6:7-9

“Seeds: Growing in Grace: What We Plant will Grow”

By Rev. Dr. Brian Jones



Have you ever had one of those years? It's been one of those years where we have gotten a little bit of everything. Or a lot bit of everything. Pandemic. Murder Hornets. Giant Spider Web Invasion in Australia? Have you seen these? Do yourself a favor and look up spider webs in Australia. You won't be disappointed, I promise you. It's been a wild ride. And we are only over the first two hills. Who knows what loop the loop is coming for us next? I saw some scientists the other day say they are working on trying to bring back the woolly mammoth by splicing DNA they have found in mummified remains, the skin and hair and bone of the mammoth. And someone automatically responded, is this the year for us to try this?

And to make it even more bizarre, I've seen people now concerned with, wait for it, mystery seeds. Mystery seeds. Yes, mystery seeds. Many people, apparently, were mailed some seeds they hadn't asked

for. A lot of people, unasked for, just randomly received mystery seeds from who knows where. I've heard China, I've heard that they really didn't come from China, it's a way to cover their tracks with false mailing labels.

It seems to be a part of some sort of scam. I'm not exactly sure how the scam works, but even I know that planting mystery seeds in 2020 is a bad idea. Just don't do it. You've no idea what might grow up in your yard.

The Department of Agriculture immediately put out warnings, above all else, don't plant the seeds. Get them to us, they said, but get rid of them. Not that the year has anything to do with it. The Department of Agriculture said never plant anything if you don't know what it is. And that makes sense. You could plant something harmful to the other plants in your yard, a plant that's not a part of the normal eco-structure. and that could set off a dangerous imbalance. You don't randomly introduce plants that aren't a part of the natural habitat, especially if you don't know what it is.

And that's just common sense, isn't it? You don't plant something if you don't know what is going to grow out of it. Why? Because once you plant a seed, whatever that seed is is what is going to grow in your soil. You can hope all you want that it's going to be apples. But if it's not an apple seed, you aren't going to have apples. You can hope all you want for an orange tree. But if what you plant isn't an orange tree, doesn't look anything like an orange seed, you aren't going to get an orange.

If you take a mystery seed and it doesn't look like whatever you would like to grow here, it's not going to produce what you want, all the well wishes, all the hopes, all the dreams, is not going to make what you want grow. You can read books on horticulture, you can get all the right fertilizers, plant food, you want. But in the end, you can only grow whatever it is you plant in the first place. It all depends on the seed.

If you've been following along with our series, you'll know that we have spent a lot of time talking about seeds. The idea is that the Christian life isn't automatic. Sometimes you have to plant seeds, you have to act in faith, to see a yield later in your own spiritual life or in the life of others or even in the world.

And we have spent a good deal of time discussing what it means to plant seeds of faith, to plant ideas, to plant the seed of faith. But what we haven't mentioned is that you also have to be very careful to plant the right seeds. Because you can't plant a bad seed, or the wrong seed, and expect something good to grow. You can only grow whatever seeds you have planted.

We see Jesus say this in our Gospel lesson. Jesus is talking about the religious practices around food found in the law. And Jesus says, *look, what you eat does not make you more or less holy. After all, whatever you eat no matter how holy will be eliminated out of the body like everything else. What makes a person holy or unholy is what is planted in the heart.*

Now, is Jesus saying the law of the Old Testament isn't important? No. Jesus simply is saying the laws, religious practices, in and of themselves were never designed by themselves to make you good. They're designed to be like plant food, fertilizer, water. They help grow the seed that's been planted. But just like all the plant food in the world will not make a good fruit, a good tree come out of a bad seed, so obeying the law, if you have planted bad seeds in your heart, it will not make them good just by doing them. In other words, what seeds you plant in your heart and spirit matters.

If you have planted seeds of anger and resentment in your heart, you are going to bear more anger and resentment. How often have you spent all week planting a seed of anger and resentment against one person and found yourself short tempered, lashing out at a completely different person? Plant seeds of fantasy, lust, and temptation in your heart, and you are going to damage, not strengthen, your marriage relationships. Plant seeds of sin in your heart, you are growing a plant that makes you feel distant from the presence of God. Plant seeds of dishonesty, you are going to break relationships and cause distrust. And just coming to church and going through the motions will not make bad seeds into good seeds.

So what can be done? First, I think it's important to see things for what God intends them to be. Religious practice is important, worship is important, corporate worship is important, the Scriptures say that. Bible study, doing your devotions, are all important. But they were never designed in and of themselves to change a bad seed planted in your heart for a good one. If you have good seeds planted in your heart, worship, study, all of it, it will enable and cause good seeds to grow and bear fruit in your life. But you can't plant bad seed, sin, in your heart all week and expect just because you came to church or read your Upper Room that it equals out.

No, the only things that can truly make a difference, and please hear this because this may be the singular most important thing you will ever hear in your life, nothing will change you or your life except a radical, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Nothing is more important for your life than this. Your joy in life and eternity hangs on the balance of this. Do I have a life-changing, radical, intimate relationship with Jesus?

Look at your life. What fruit did you bear this week? Was it good or bad? Did it hurt or heal? Was it self-centered or self-giving, was it full of rage and frustration or peace? Did you bear joy or sorrow to people around you? Did you strengthen or fray relationships. The fruit of your life bears the tale of the seeds you have planted.

When we give our lives to Jesus, we can not only confess the bad seeds planted, but Jesus will actually remove those bad seeds from our lives. You don't have to bear those seeds. Your life can be different. Please know that.

When you give your life to Jesus, He removes the seeds, and He will begin to cultivate your heart, get it ready. And that isn't always a pleasant experience. It can take a lot of soul searching. A lot of painful things have to be removed. But Jesus isn't being cruel. He's getting the soil of your heart ready.

When you give your life, truly surrender it to Jesus, He plants good seeds. Seeds of love. For all people. Seeds of healing, not fraying relationships. Seeds of truth, not dishonesty. Seeds of fidelity and integrity in your relationships, not fantasy of intimacy that hurts other people. Seeds of good and not evil. And when those seeds are planted, we see the fruit of the spirit begin to grow. We become a blessing. What has the fruit of your life been? Are you ready for Jesus to plant something different within your heart? Amen.