

The Methodist circuit riders were the great frontiersmen. Francis Asbury who was the founding father of American Methodism ministered as a circuit rider for more than 50 years. He continued his ministry of the itinerancy until he could not walk by himself. He had confidence, passion and enthusiasm for spreading the Gospel. The Methodist circuit riders went westward along with other frontiersmen and founded Methodist churches along the way. There was no security in those areas. However, the Methodist preachers dared to go anywhere to spread the Gospel.

Our faith should be like this. We need to have the frontier spirit in our faith. Don't be afraid of any obstacles or hindrances in your journey of faith. When you face difficulty in your life, you have to devote yourself to the Word of God and trust the sincerity of God. God wants us to grow and bear much fruit in our lives. Praise God for the miracle of growth and salvation He performs for us! Praise God for his healing love for us!

When I had a conversation with farmers in Prophetstown, I learned that there is a newly developed technique in sowing. But I didn't get exactly what was it. Anyway, they plow and disk the ground before sowing. However, first century farmers cast seed over unplowed ground and then turned the seed into the dirt. The sower sowed everywhere, even though his soil was not good enough for producing abundant crops. Likewise, God gives rain to both good people and bad people. God lets good seeds and the weeds grow together until the harvest. This is God's prevenient Grace which God gives all people no matter what they are. It is God's blessing for us. And also, it is a good opportunity for us to change and become good soil and good ground. We still have a chance!

Let us sow God's love as generously as God sows in our ministry at Faith Church. Let us try our best to produce a good harvest as we make ourselves into the good soil by prayer and devotion for God's ministry. We have hope for an abundant harvest in our ministry and life. Let us not be discouraged when many kinds of people and situations challenge us. Someday the seed we cast in God's name will be multiplied thirty times, or sixty times or a hundred times.

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Making Good Soil

Mark 4:3-8

Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

As I told you before, our family lived in Madison, NJ, a suburban of New York City. I usually took a train called the New Jersey Transit to visit downtown NYC. I hated traffic and paying the toll to cross the George Washington Bridge, the Lincoln Tunnel, or the Holland Tunnel. However, sometimes I had to drive through Manhattan to give a ride or pick up some one at the La Guardia Airport or to visit a Korean church in Flushing. Whenever I passed through Manhattan, I got trapped by traffic. One day while driving in Manhattan, I saw a car which had many bumper stickers. Among the stickers I found one which caught my attention. The sticker said, "GOD LOVES YOU." It made me comfortable to think about God's love for me. However, I found another sticker. The sticker said, "I LOVE NEW YORK." I didn't know about the life of that person who had many bumper stickers. But the two stickers reflect our life and faith. Even though God continually loves us, many times we care about our lives. We focus more on how to live, how to earn, and how to eat than how to glorify God and how to live by the Word of God.

When Esther and our children visited Korea about 10 years ago, Eunice experienced pain in her knees. Esther really wanted Eunice to be seen by a doctor during their visit in Korea. She planned to visit the Severance Hospital, one of the best hospitals in Korea founded by the American missionaries. She contacted Doctor Kim, who was a chief doctor in the pediatric department of the Hospital and a professor of Yonsei University Medical school. He was also a lay leader of Chung Dong First Methodist Church. Unfortunately, he was not in his office. He was in Myanmar, South Asia to help people who were suffering from the tsunami. In spite of his busy schedule at the hospital and school, he organized a medical relief team with his staff as soon as he heard the news of the tsunami. I was impressed and spiritually challenged by Dr. Kim's devotion to serve people in need. During an interview, Dr. Kim commented that as God loved him, he loved God and his neighbors. Everyone is loved by God. While some people sincerely respond to God's love, other people don't care about God's love. God's love is the same, but people have different responses to God's love.

Today's story has been known as the "Parable of The Sower." This title makes us focus on what God does and how gracious God is in this story. However, when we look at this story carefully, Jesus tells us that different kinds of people respond to the gospel in different ways. Therefore, we may change the "Parable of the Sower" to the "Parable of the Soils."

Jesus knew that people are different. He told a parable: *"Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."* (Mark 4:3-8)

In the following verses, Jesus explained this parable to his disciples. Some people do not understand the gospel because the path of their heart is too hard for the seed to bury itself and develop roots. Some people receive the word with joy, but the soil of their heart is too rocky. So the word endures in their lives for only a short time. It never develops the roots that it needs to survive hard times. Still others allow the living word, but they care too much for worldly things, such as the lure of wealth or power or prestige. They neglect the hearing of the word, prayer, and the fellowship of other believers. And then there is the good soil. These people hear the word and understand it, and indeed bear fruit and yield, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.

Today's story brings us a question: What kind of soil are we? How do we respond to the Word of God? How do we respond to the various acts of God in our lives? Let us examine ourselves. Do we think that God doesn't care for us or that God is powerless and weak when things are not working out the way we want? Do we allow the cares of this world to interfere? Do our ambitions and desires for success and happiness choke out God's messages? Or, do we delve into the depths of the word that we have received so that it might be fruitful in our lives? How we respond to the Word of God is the key to the fruitfulness of the gospel.

According to Acts, when Peter preached the Gospel to the people in Jerusalem, they repented and said, *"Brothers, what shall we do?"* (Acts 2:37) However, when Stephen preached the Gospel before the Sanhedrin, they were furious and finally stoned him and killed him. When Jesus preached in Nazareth, his hometown, they didn't open their minds and refused to listen to his words. So Jesus didn't perform any miracles or healing work in his hometown. When people accept the Gospel, there are many changes, such as healing power, the works of repentance, empowerment, and salvation. When people refuse to accept the Gospel, there are no particular works, changes or miracles in their ministry or life. Do you really want to accept the Gospel? Do you really want the Gospel to give new power and new energy in your life? Then you need to change your soil into good ground.

We have a choice to receive and respond to the gospel message or not. We can change to the good soil if we want. We are not passive receivers of the Gospel. We have power over how we respond to the Gospel. God has given us freedom to say "Yes" to Him or "No" to Him. God also has given us the freedom to have hearts that are fruitful for him or hearts in which the word is quickly snatched away and dies.

There are many seeds that God casts into our lives. All of them are meant to land in good soil and to produce abundant fruit. But, some seed falls in places where it simply will not thrive. God allows the seed to land on the hard paths and the rocky ground. God allows the seed to land in the thickets of our lives. Because God has the hope that in those places it will find a place to mature and bear fruit. God has the hope that those things which hinder growth will be removed. God has the hope that the soil might be just a little deeper than it at first appeared to be in those rocky places.

The American frontiersmen dared to go westward to find new and better opportunities. They had to face and fight many hindrances, such as nature, disease, starvation and invaders. They faced the Appalachian Mountains, but they didn't give up; they crossed the mountains. They finally got to the broad land in the Midwest. However, they weren't satisfied with this land and challenged themselves to find another opportunity. They continued to go westward. They had to face bigger mountains, which are the Rocky Mountains and desert. They never gave up; they overcame those hindrances. Then, they finally arrived at the west coast and got the beautiful land. They dared to change, challenge, and sacrifice themselves. The frontier spirit made this country bigger and stronger.