

Lake Shore Baptist Church Sermon – Charlie Fuller

July 12, 2020

Text: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Title: *Finding our Inner Farmer*

My parents both grew up on farms. Not the kind of farms you might think of here in Texas. Farms that spread out on flat land as far as the eye can see. No, their parents were subsistence farmers. Subsistence farmers working fields that required breaking lots of rocks and plowing up and down steep hills. My grandparents tried to grow enough vegetables and fruit and raise enough hogs and other livestock each year to make it to the next year. And they also had to pick up small jobs like at the local lumber mill to make ends meet – when those ends actually did meet. My parents knew all about canning vegetables and smoking meat. While they were part of a generation that would not talk much about it, I also know that during the depths of the Great Depression they very likely went to bed many nights as children not knowing what or if they would eat the next day.

My wife Cindy's family were also farmers, two of her uncles in particular. They lived up on the north side of Dallas and they stayed at farming much longer. Compared to my family, they were big-time farmers. They had combines and tractors and worked massive leased farms in their area. They went to the bank each spring to get a loan to maintain their equipment and buy seed and fertilizer. Then they worked hard through the year and into the fall, hoping against hope that they got enough rain, that the seeds would bear enough crop, that there wouldn't be a blight. No doubt the life of a farmer was like walking on eggshells. There were all kinds of things that could go wrong and they'd be left with less than nothing. There'd be no crop and they'd still have to pay the bank.

The life of a farmer is like that of a *riverboat gambler*. You put these tiny seeds in the ground and have to just hope they come up and bear a crop.

I'm sure 1st Century farming was even more risky. A farmer's collateral was probably himself, not his land. One bad season and you simply didn't eat. Maybe you became a slave or an indentured servant. You'd go to bed hungry night after night after night. When Jesus told parables about farmers, everyone got the message.

This parable has so many levels of meaning. One of them is this: What farmer simply spreads his valuable seeds all over the place? What farmer doesn't pay attention to the kind of soil in which they plant their seeds? While that's not the part of the story we're going to focus on this morning, isn't it remarkable that God spreads God's love everywhere? Regardless of the kind of soil in which it might land? How wasteful. How wonderfully remarkable. What extravagant love.

But this morning I want to talk about seeds and thorns. Some of the seeds fell in among the thorns. This is one of Jesus' parables that he actually explains. When you have to explain a parable, it seems almost like when you have to explain a joke. It just doesn't

work as well when you have to explain it. I can almost see Jesus frustrated. Really? Do I have to spell it out for you? Don't you get this, yet? Ok, here's what it means....

So, Jesus talks about the different soils into which God's extravagant love is cast. And the actual thing that is cast is God's word, it's Scripture. The seed is the Jesus story. And it has different outcomes based on where it goes.

Jesus tells us in his own explanation that sometimes it finds its way into beds of thorns. He says specifically, "the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing."

Let me ask you, "Do you have cares? Cares of the world?" Certainly, we all do. If we didn't before early March, we do now. Will we have a job? How will we do our job? How do I care for my kids at home and still do my job? How do I stay safe from this virus? What about my aged parents? My loved one in a care facility? When will my life return to normal? What's normal anymore? When will this be over? What will the world look like when this is over?

Those are cares of the world. No doubt about it. And Jesus describes them as thorns, thorns that can choke out the seeds of the Jesus story.

And what about the lure of wealth? It's difficult to think that most folks are very tempted by the lure of wealth. At least right now. Just getting my bills paid, keeping my job, feeding my kids is not the lure of wealth that Jesus is talking about.

But, as always, we must remember the context into which Jesus spoke his parables. The lure of wealth was real then and it's real now. I believe that what Jesus calls the "lure of wealth" is a part of why we're seeing such a precipitous decline in the energy and vitality of Jesus' church in America. It might be the biggest factor in that decline. We live in a materialistic culture and we're bombarded with materialistic messages. Most of us hearing this sermon will never go to bed hungry not knowing from where their next meal will come. The Jesus story is being choked out by the thorns of self-sufficiency.

The lure of wealth, self-sufficiency, the cares of the world are thorns that choke out the growth of the Jesus story in our hearts and in our lives. The thorns distract us and take away time and energy from what really matters. The thorns fight with the Jesus story to extend roots into our lives. We need to pull those thorns and plant more seeds. When we pull up those thorns there's more room for things like justice to grow in our hearts. When we pull up those thorns, we can water and plant seeds of concern for others, for the marginalized, the outcast, those discriminated against.

By the way, in case you're curious, let me tell you the story of Cindy's two uncles, the farmers in north Dallas. They lived for years and years just north of Valley View Mall. They had a couple of acres there with two small frame houses, a small garden, and all their farm equipment. As Dallas grew around them, they had to go farther and farther

north to do their farming. Over the years their little couple of acres was surrounded by apartments and a convenience store across the street. That was also the time for them to retire. They sold their property at such a profit that they were able to buy a spread halfway between McKinney and Denton, build two brand new beautiful homes, and retire comfortably. Their gambling life of farming paid off with a jackpot.

Maybe God is a riverboat gambler, too. God spreads the seed of Scripture, the Jesus story, anywhere and everywhere, hoping for it to pay off. And I don't know about you, but I'm glad God is such a gambler – because God gambled on me.

Thanks be to God!