

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Year A - Proper 10, Text: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23
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Chapter 13 constitutes Matthew's third discourse. It focuses on Jesus telling and interpreting parables. The present pericope has to do with the telling and interpreting of the well-known parable of the sower.

Verses 13:1–2: “That same day” links the parables of Chapter 13 with the preceding chapters that focus on the conflicts between Jesus and His audience.

At first, Jesus taught while sitting on the seashore of the Sea of Galilee. However, because great crowds came to listen to Him, He stepped into a boat and taught while seated in that boat. (Rabbis sat while teaching; see Matthew 5:1–2.) However, the crowds on the beach remained in a standing position. Those who have visited Palestine or Israel have probably seen some amphitheater-like sites having remarkable acoustic properties along the western shoreline of the Sea of Galilee.

Verse 13:3: The repetition of the verb *went out* draws attention to parallels between Jesus in His ministry and the sower in His parable.

In Palestine, seed was scattered prior to plowing — and, as might be expected, some of it was scattered on ground that was unsuitable. However, in the parable, three kinds of loss are balanced against three forms of abundance.

Verse 13:4: This verse is interpreted in verse 13:19. Some seed that falls on hard walking paths are devoured by birds. The reference is to those who never accept Jesus' message of the Kingdom. Although they hear what He says, they do not invite Him or His message into their hearts.

Verses 13:5–6: These verses are interpreted in verses 13:20–21. Some seed falls on shallow soil, with rocks underneath. It does not penetrate deeply into soil, and although it initially sprouts, the heat of the sun causes it to wither. Likewise, some who hear Jesus' teachings believe for a while, but fall away because of persecution or apathy.

Verse 13:7: The verse is interpreted later in v. 22. Some seed takes root in the soil and sprouts. However, weeds grow up alongside the wheat stalks and strangle them. Likewise, some who hear come to faith, but their spiritual life is choked by worldly anxiety and the seductions of riches, comfort, and pleasure.

Verse 13:8: This verse is interpreted in verse 13:23. Some seed falls on good soil and brings forth grain not merely in an abundant manner (tenfold) but in a spectacular manner (a hundred-fold, sixty-fold, and thirty-fold). There will be those who respond to Jesus' message and produce an abundance of spiritual fruit.

The sower “went out.” And sowers continue to go out — knowing full well that some of the seed that they sow will be destroyed by one hazard or another. That sowers continue to go out, season after season, is a tribute to their confidence in the processes of nature and in the Lord of nature.

By speaking of a harvest of such astonishing proportions, Jesus shares His confidence in His Father's eventual triumph over all opposition, of victory beyond all present loss, of glory on the far side of pain. The parable can be seen as a response to the misunderstanding and rejection that Jesus had been suffering at the hands of crowds (11:12, 16–19), Galilean cities (11:20–24), and the Jewish religious leaders (12:24).

The word of God's Kingdom is to be proclaimed openly to all. However, it experiences both failure and success. Some people lose it immediately. Others fall away when tribulation or persecutions arise. Others begin well enough, but the cares of the world (worries of the poor), or delight in riches (the worries of the wealthy), eventually choke the seed of God's Word so that it proves unfruitful and produces nothing. However, some seed falls on good soil. Some hearers hold fast to God's Good News, rejoice and trust in God's grace, live joyfully in spite of troubles and tribulation, and care for God rather than for earthly treasures.

Jesus, the True Word, was called and chosen by His Father in heaven, held fast to His Word, lived with simple trust and joy when rejected by His hearers, obeyed His Father all the way to the cross, cared nothing for His own security — and thereby bore much fruit; see John 2:24.

The central point of the parable is that in spite of opposition and indifference on the part of some of His hearers, Jesus' message about the coming of the Kingdom will produce an abundant spiritual harvest.