

**“Tell Me the Stories of Jesus;
Parables that Challenge, Convict and Comfort”
“Seeds of Possibility and Peace”**

We begin a new sermon series “Tell Me the Stories of Jesus; Parables that Challenge, Convict and Comfort.” Using Amy-Jill Levine’s book *Short Stories by Jesus* as a springboard, this series will help us look at the stories Jesus told in a new ways. Jesus’ listeners may and probably did hear these stories very differently than we do in the twenty-first century. The first parable is the story of the farmer who sowed seeds and some flourished and some did not. It all had to do with the kind of soil in which the seed was planted. This week the invitation is to see how it is with the soil of our hearts and spirits. How is it with your soul? ---Pastor Cindy

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“Seeds of Possibility and Peace”**

Prayer for the Week

God of all creation, sow your seeds of love and grace in us. If our hearts are like stony ground, soften them. If our hearts are full of weeds, pull the weeds of hatred, resentment and bitterness, that they may be ready for all you offer. When the soil of our hearts are prepared, like good soil, may the plants that grow there bear the fruits of love, of justice, of mercy and grace. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

This week’s sermon may be viewed at <http://sundaystreams.com/go/firstwichita>

Study Guide

7/03/17 Matthew 13: 1-2

Throughout the gospels, people gathered to listen to Jesus. They hungered for the stories that he offered and the insight they might gain. Earlier in Matthew is the “epic” Sermon on the Mount which includes chapters 5-7. While most of this sermon is sayings and proverbs, blessings and warnings, it also includes some stories. Jesus’ sayings are not always easy to understand, to grasp or to live out. In the next few chapters of Matthew, Jesus will be sharing some stories that both convict, challenge and comfort. First, it is important for us, as well as it was for the crowds of Jesus’ day, to prepare ourselves for what the gospel might be saying to us. Today say a prayer that your heart and spirit are ready to hear and understand what Jesus has to say to us.

7/04/17 Matthew 13: 18-23

Today is Independence Day in the United States. Many people celebrate with fireworks, cookouts and gathering of family and friends. It is a time to remember those who went before us who risked everything on this great experiment of democracy. At its best this country proclaims freedom and equality for everyone. Of course as human beings, living out the ideal is never easy. The explanation of the parable of the sower is a reminder that the privilege of freedom, of liberty and faith are dependent on the good soil of people’s hearts and spirits. Those who have worked for justice, freedom and equality, those who have died for it have sacrificed much for those who have followed. Today, say a prayer for peace, for justice and equality for all people and for an opportunity to live out your faith as a beloved child of God.

7/05/17 Matthew 13: 3-7

It is a little backwards to share the “meaning” of the parable before exploring the parable itself. However, Independence Day can invite a reflection on the community of faith’s life and spirit. Today, we go back to the parable of the sower. It is a simple story, a farmer goes out to plant. In today’s society there are huge machines to drill wheat and plant other seed in the ground that covers hundreds of acres. In Jesus’ day, it would have been simpler. One person scatters seeds and some are lost due to the hostile ground: either the ground is too hard or the birds come and eat it up, or it is rocky and so sprouts begin to grow, but there isn’t enough depth for it to flourish or there are thorns and weeds and it is choked out. Are there things in your life that keep you from hearing and experiencing God’s love and grace?

7/06/17 Matthew 13: 8-9

After describing all the “bad” soil or soil that wasn’t prepared to grow seed that would produce, here Jesus says what happens when the seed fall on good soil. The seed grows and produces good fruit and lots of it. Sometimes in looking at this story, people assume that “other” people are the rocky soil, the thorny soil, the hard path or even the good soil. Perhaps, just perhaps, at different times in our lives we are any one of the different soils. Maybe, there are times we are rocky or full of weeds, but others times we are ready to receive what God is offering. Is the soil of your heart and spirit good soil?

07/07/17 Romans 7: 14-25

These powerful words of Paul help us focus on the parable of the sower and the seed. Here he describes his own experience of wanting to do what is right and good but often missing the mark. Paul points out that just because someone knows what is right, does not mean he or she will do what is right. That is the paradox of being human. Often, people choose the opposite of what they should do. This passage reminds the reader that even though it is easy to condemn others, each person finds it no easier to live out their faith. Each person has a heart and spirit and mind which is sometimes rocky soil, sometimes filled with thorns and sometimes is fertile and ready to grow. How is the soil of your soul? Is it ready to receive God’s gift of grace, love and mercy?