

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

July 12, 2026 – PENTECOST 7/PROPER 10 YR. A

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Homily: “*The Gracious Sower and the Good Soil*”

Isaiah 55:10-13	(God's Word goes forth and does not return empty)
Psalms 65:1-14	(The Lord sends rain and increases the crops)
Romans 8:1-11	(There is no condemnation for those in Christ)
St. Matthew 13:1-9,18-23	(Jesus teaches the parable of the sower)

There is a kind of hope that only a gardener, a farmer, or anyone who has ever pressed seed into the soil can understand. You do the work, but you cannot make the growth happen. You turn the ground, scatter the seed, water the rows, pull the weeds, and wait beneath the sky. But the mystery of life and growth belongs to God.

Jesus sits by the sea, climbs into a boat, and tells a crowd a story that sounds ordinary enough: “A sower went out to sow.” The people listening knew what He meant. They knew paths packed hard by many feet. They knew thin soil over hidden rock. They knew thorns that could overtake a field. They knew good earth, too, and the joy of a harvest far beyond the expectations of what anyone had placed in the ground.

The first surprise in this parable is not the soil, but the sower. This sower scatters seed *everywhere*. Not only where success appears to be guaranteed. Not only in neat rows and protected plots. Seed falls on the hard path, on rocky ground, among thorns, and on good soil. The sower is not stingy. The sower is extravagantly generous.

That is good news, because Jesus is teaching us about the Word of God and His Kingdom. God's Word is not rationed out only to the already receptive, the already mature, the already holy, the already prepared. God speaks into hard places, shallow places, crowded places, and fruitful places. God keeps on sowing His message of love and forgiveness that we are free to receive—or not.

Before this parable asks, “What kind of soil am I?” it first declares, “What kind of God do we have?” We have a God who scatters mercy with a wide hand. We have a Savior who speaks from the boat to the shore, to disciples and doubters, to crowds and critics, to hearts that are open and hearts that are not yet ready. God's Kingdom is characterized by divine generosity. We have only to receive it. But what if we turn away, and reject God's outstretched hand filled with blessings for us?

In the parable, Jesus turns our attention to the various ways both God's written Word, the Bible, and His Living Word, Jesus Christ, are received. Some seed falls on the paved path. The heart is hardened, and the Word does not sink in. It remains on the surface, vulnerable to being snatched away. We are familiar with this condition. Sometimes pain, disappointment, pride, pressure, or anxiety can pack our souls down hard like a road. We hear what God is saying, but we do not receive.

Some seed falls on rocky ground. There is an immediate joy, a quick beginning, a bright green shoot. But there is no root. When trouble comes, when faith costs something, when the sun grows hot, the plant withers. This is the danger of a faith that lives only on emotion, only on the inspiration of the moment, only on Sunday enthusiasm without weekday depth.

Other seed falls among thorns. The Word begins to grow, but it must compete with other powers. Jesus names them plainly: the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth. Anxiety over these can choke the Word. The constant pressure to manage, achieve, protect, accumulate, and control our lives and our possessions can grow like a strangling vine around the soul until the Living Word within us has no room to breathe.

Then finally, some seed falls on good soil. These are the ones who hear the Word and understand it. They do not merely hear, but also receive the truth. They not only admire Jesus, but also trust and obey Him. They don't just begin; rather, they abide, they remain, they are well-rooted in that good soil. And from that soil comes good fruit—thirty, sixty, even a hundredfold.

The point of this message is not for us to sort ourselves and everyone else into categories. It is not, “Those people are the path, those people are rocky, those people are thorny, and we are the good soil.” The words of Jesus are kinder—and sharper—than that. He invites each of us to question: Where has my heart become hard? Where is my faith shallow? What thorns are crowding out the life of God in me? Where might the Spirit be making me receptive, patient, and fruitful?

Good soil is not soil that boasts about itself. Good soil is soil that has been broken apart so that it can be opened. It has received rain. It has been cleared of what would choke the seed. In other words, good soil sometimes develops through adversity and struggle. It is not a personality type, but rather a grace-shaped heart—and only God can give us that.

This is where today’s Psalm 65 helps us hear Matthew 13 with greater hope. The psalm praises God as the one who visits the earth and waters it, who enriches it abundantly, who softens it with showers, who blesses its growth. The psalmist imagines creation itself crowned with bounty: pastures clothed with flocks, valleys decked with grain, hills girded with joy.

Psalm 65 reminds us that fruitfulness is not self-manufactured. The field does not water itself. The valley does not crown itself with grain. God provides what the ground cannot provide on its own. So when Jesus calls us to be good soil, He is not telling us to save ourselves by trying harder. He is inviting us to receive His grace that softens, clears, roots, and grows.

Moreover, Jesus promises us a bountiful harvest: a hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold. In a world where so much seed seems wasted, that promise matters. Some words of grace appear ignored. Some acts of love seem to be forgotten. Some prayers fall on hard ground. Some ministries sprout quickly and fade. Some faithful efforts are tangled in thorns. But this parable does not end with failure. It ends with abundance. The Kingdom of Heaven is not defeated by hard paths, hidden rocks, or stubborn weeds. The Sower keeps sowing. The Word keeps working. The Spirit keeps preparing the soil. And in places we may not expect, fruit—juicy delicious wonderful fruit—appears.

This should be encouraging for anyone who teaches children, prays for family members, serves in quiet ways, preaches, visits, gives, forgives, or bears witness. We do not control the harvest. We are called simply to faithfulness. It is God who provides the growth. Jesus ends by saying, “Let anyone with ears listen.” He means listening is more than hearing words. True listening to God is surrender. Listening is allowing His Word to penetrate our rigid surfaces. Listening is letting God name the hardness, expose the shallowness, pull out the thorns, and cultivate the fruit.

So, in the days to come, let us remember the gracious character of the Sower. God is still scattering seed. God is still sending rain. God is still crowning the year with goodness. God is still bringing life from the earth and fruit from the heart. The path can be broken open. The rocky place can be plowed. The thorny ground can be cleared. The good soil can become more fruitful still.

In Matthew 13, Jesus gives us a field and asks us to see our hearts. In Psalm 65, the psalmist gives us a watered earth and asks us to see our God. Put them together, and the Gospel shines: the God who sows the Word is also the God who sends the rain. The God who seeks fruit is also the God who prepares the soil. The God who calls us to listen is also the God who gives us ears to hear and hearts to receive.

May God’s written Word, the Holy Scriptures, and God’s Living Word, Jesus Christ, be planted deeply within us. May the worries of this life lose their grip on us. May the roots of our faith grow strong within us. And by the mercy of the generous Sower, may our lives bear good fruit—thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold—to the glory of God.

Let us pray: Lord of the Harvest, prepare in us good soil. Where we are hard, soften us. Where we are shallow, deepen us. Where we are crowded by worries and defeats, clear these out. And where Your Word has taken root, make us abundantly fruitful for Your Kingdom. This we ask through the Power of Your Spirit, and in Jesus’ Holy Name. *Amen.*