

Adele Gaboury's neighbors were some really nice people. When this 73 year old woman's lawn needed mowing they stepped up without even being asked. When her house needed repairs they made them. When her pipes froze and broke they called the utility company and had them turned off to prevent further damage. And when her mailed backed up in the mailbox a helpful neighbor collected it for her. Trouble was no one really ever saw Adele. That's because she lay dead in her home. Police figure it happened four years earlier. The helpful neighbors served around her home but never thought to serve the person inside.

This true story from the early 90's shows the difference between serving by doing things and actually serving people. We'd like to believe this couldn't happen today, but it's almost more likely. We're further in our own little bubbles than ever before. We might not even notice mail piling up across the street. We might notice the lawn only if it gets so long that we have to complain and call the city to come mow it. There are exceptions of course, but serving others and taking notice of others is something our sinful natures want no part of.

As a congregation our mission vision statement includes worship, Bible study, and outreach. These share Christ and make sense for us to be doing. But our mission also is to serve others. The fourth component allows us to look to a parable of Jesus recorded in the gospel. Something happens when the Word of God is applied to someone's heart. A change takes place and what used to be hardened soil that wouldn't care about serving anyone ever, suddenly bursts forth in service. We look at that parable to see how we should...

Display the beauty of Christian service

You're dirt. Actually Jesus calls you better than dirt; you're good soil perfect for growing and producing crops. Jesus calls your heart the good soil that the Word of God is scattered on and takes root in. Those hearts produce good fruit in abundance. But how did your heart get to be such good soil? It was that Word of God. ***"He who has ears, let him hear."*** You heard it and still do today. You hear it regularly and often. Worship and Bible study, the first two components of the mission vision statement are important to you because there you hear God's Word.

Being good soil requires more than just hearing. You also have to understand. This you can't achieve on your own. Ask yourself if you understand completely every part of the Bible? You probably answer, no. That's true for me too. But the Word of God is not some mysterious locked book. By hearing it regularly and often and through the power of the Holy Spirit the words don't just hit your ears; they enter your heart by faith. God's Word has an effect on you.

The farmer Jesus pictures in this parable is scattering seed. The seeds can end up on all different kinds of soils, but when it lands on good soil it produces a crop. ***"Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown."*** That's already happening to you. The Word of God has been planted in your heart and God is harvesting a crop. It's producing at 100, 60, or 30 times what was sown. That's how God's Word multiplies. This production happens naturally when the Word of God is sown. Good works and Christian service will be found.

Seems God's expectations are high. He looks for a bumper crop of good works and Christian service. But what if you look at your life and think you're not measuring up? You read articles about individuals who get an idea to start a charity drive. They plan it, run it, and have big success. Maybe you wonder why you haven't done something like that, or why the church hasn't managed to start something like that. Or maybe you think about serving and volunteering but every time the opportunity comes around you can't find the time. Or maybe you struggle because you don't see the congregation getting involved with enough service events around the community like other churches do. It all can make you wonder if you or the congregation care at all about Christian service.

Selfish thinking is natural, for you and me. It doesn't make it right; it's the reality of sin. Serving others isn't first priority. Even if it were, do we always serve for the right reason? Christian service can only come from a heart of good soil. Good soil only is created through God's Word and Christ Jesus. ***"The one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it."*** Our Savior brings us to faith. Only by going back to what Jesus did for us can we be encouraged to glorify God with our good works of service towards others. That's growing in grace, and grace is what sent Christ Jesus, and Christ Jesus is who saved us. So our good works are a result of his sacrifice. We don't serve because we're great, because we want to show off, or because we're obligated. We serve because we love Christ and he loved us first. Love for Christ leads us to display the beauty of Christian service.

Jesus intended for all people to find themselves in the good soil category. He wants all people to be saved and to know him as Savior. Then they will produce a crop of good works and Christian service. But we've been other types of soil at different times. Jesus wants us to know that too so by recognizing that we can continue going back to him to move towards becoming good soil.

The other soils Jesus mentions all relate to different people in life. The first was hard soil or the path. This Jesus said is a lazy indifferent person. ***"When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart."*** All of us are by nature sinful hard soil where Satan can come along and snatch the good news away before it ever takes root at all. By nature we want nothing to do with God because of it.

The second soil is not rocks on the surface, but rather a layer of dirt where beneath is all rock. That little bit of topsoil allows seeds to start growing. But there's no long term growth because there's no access to water or root. **"But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time."** These are people grasping God's Word superficially. They hear it and love having the gospel at first. But it doesn't sink in very deep. When trouble comes they once again look inside themselves for strength. They have no inner strength and they fall away. When opportunities for Christian service come they might serve but it's for show. It's not rooted in faith in Christ. Such a person reads the Word of God only sporadically. They don't value worship or Bible study and don't make it regularly.

The third soil isn't bad; it's just overgrown with weeds so thick they choke off the good plants. Anyone thinking worldly will be choked off by the weeds of materialism and wealth. God's Word is smothered before it really has a chance. This person worries about everything rather than serving. Food, clothing, health, savings, and housing are just some of the things this person worries about. Sinful worry consumes their thinking and time. They have nothing left for bringing forth good fruits of Christian service. Over time this worry kicks Jesus out of the heart too.

These three soils are not where you want to be. If you're worrying right now about something else far less important than Jesus listen up. If you're joyfully listening along but the understanding of the gospel isn't going much further than the ears listen up. If you're dangerously close to being that hard soil where the Word is unimportant and Satan can just snatch it away then listen. There's hope in Christ. Fill up on the gospel message and see these sins are forgiven. Hear about Jesus all over again. Apply what Jesus did to you. Say, Jesus died for my sins, he's my Savior. Grow in God's grace and then glorify him with Christian service.

I find no need to list off acts of Christian service you could do. Such a list is longer than we have time for because at any point in your life you have acts of Christian service to choose from. The crop of good works of Christian service are multiplying 100, 60, even 30 times what was sown. But all those acts you could do, every one of them is motivated not by you, but by Christ. Any service you want to do to help others needs a good dose of gospel to do it. Get back to the Word, hear all about Jesus again, and understand what Jesus has done for you. Then you'll display the beauty of Christian service.

This parable is about what happens when the Word of God is applied to human hearts. **"The one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown."** You can serve to that level. You can because that's what God's Word does for you. That's what Christ does for you. The Word of God, the grace of God, faith in Christ Jesus produces fruit, it produces service. Not as some badge of honor, not earning you anything, and not something God is measuring. Service is not a measure of how much you love God. You love God because God first loved you in Christ. Now love and serve others. Display the beauty of Christian service.