

As I read today’s passage from Matthew, I actually first dwelt on the first three words: **“That same day...”** (Matthew 13:1) For the author to make the effort to tie in this particular event with what had happened earlier made me think that perhaps I should look at the preceding verses. I would find that what had happened earlier that day was that when Jesus was told that his brothers and mother had come to see him, he replied that **“Whoever does the will of my Father is my brother and sister and mother.”** (Matthew 12:50)

Here Jesus is saying something that we should all take to heart: that our identity as God’s children... and Jesus’ brothers and sisters... is not a matter of biological birth, but spiritual birth. As you and I seek in our lives to ‘do the will of our heavenly Father,’ we prove ourselves to be sons and daughters of God. The ‘fruit’ that we bear shows from what ‘tree’ we grow out of...

And how do we go about ‘doing God’s will?’ By following His commands. By living by this ‘instruction manual’ called The Bible. In the words of our Call to Worship, **“Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”** (Psalm 119:105) But gosh, that’s a pretty extensive ‘manual,’ right? Looks more like a ‘search-light’ than a ‘table lamp,’ wouldn’t you say? I can hardly remember what I read in the morning paper, let alone everything that’s written in this Book! Surely there’s a ‘Bible for Dummies,’ right? Some ‘Readers’ Digest Condensed version?’ I’m no Bible expert...

I do remember, though, when an ‘expert in the Law’ tried to set Jesus up with regards to His knowledge of Scripture. He asked Him what the most important Commandment was... knowing that whichever one of the ‘Torah Top

10' this rebel preacher would pick, then BAM! They'd have him for blasphemy. Get the stones ready. Those tablets from Moses were a package deal. They were an 'all or done' proposition...

And do you know what Jesus said? I'll give you a hint. We heard it, and sang it, as our opening of worship this morning. ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment.³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”*** (Matthew 22:37-40)

All of the 10 Commandments... indeed, all of the 'Bible that Jesus read'... could be summed up in those two directives of Jesus: LOVE GOD. LOVE ONE ANOTHER. Vertical relationship. Horizontal relationship. Kind of like the components of the cross.

And so, for the next few minutes, we will consider what the man who hung on that cross to show HIS 'love for God,' and 'love for us', had to say from a little rowboat to those gathered on the shoreline. How he used some common elements of seed and soil to communicate the struggles in hearing and doing God's will. How Jesus Himself 'sows some seeds of thought' on how to be better 'sisters and brothers' to Him as He shares some **'Thoughts from a 'Sow-boat.'**

What we will be doing is to relate each one of the ways to 'Love the Lord your God' to a particular 'soil sample.' First we are love God with all of our **HEART**. Which is difficult when our hearts can be like so much **ROCKY GROUND**. Now, I'm going to say that this is NOT the same as someone whose heart is **hardened**... like rock. That is a much more 'systemic' problem, that penetrates all through a person. In Paul's words, ***“They are darkened in their understanding,***

alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.” (Ephesians 4:18) Much more challenging.

I would say that there are a lot of good folks that struggle with ‘Rocky ground syndrome’... such as those in the life of the CHURCH. US! There is definitely good soil in a person’s heart that brings them to worship... both ‘actual’ and ‘virtual’... and they receive those ‘seeds’ of God’s word with JOY! But there are so many ‘rocks’ of responsibilities and activities, that it doesn’t leave much space for the Word to ‘take root.’ That joy only ‘endures for a while,’ and when trials and tests of one’s faith come, there is not enough ‘depth’ of fertile ground to sustain a resilient trust in God. There’s just too much other ‘stuff’ crowding out the space... often called ‘time’... for which faith to grow and flourish.

As we all know, there is a certain church building project going on out on a little patch of soil in SE Lake Charles. Before the first stick of lumber could be nailed or the first ounce of concrete could be poured, the building site had to be cleared of rocks, sticks, and other debris. The dirt had to be properly graded to provide a level building surface. The ground had to be adequately **prepared** to ensure that the physical **structure** to be **built** upon it would **stand firm**.

These spiritual structures God seeks to build in us are no different. There are impurities in the ‘soil’ of our hearts that need to be removed. There are those stones of activity and busy-ness that are crowding out a healthy foundation of faith in Jesus Christ... THE ‘cornerstone’ to a sturdy building that will stand strong in the face of ***“trouble and persecution.”*** What are you and I doing to be adequately **prepared** to ensure that what God is building in us will stand firm...so that we might truly ***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart”*** (Mt 22:37)?

Another one of Jesus' "Thoughts from His 'sow-boat'" related to seeds that fell among the **THORNS**. These thorns are described as the *"cares of the world and the lure of wealth (which) choke the word, and it yields nothing."* (Matthew 13:22) These sound to me to be MUCH more than just those 'stones' of daily activities that might be considered beneficial, but just in excess, needing some 'weeding out,' if you will. These 'worldly cares and wealth' are those motivations for actions that, like a **THORN**, can **pierce** us to our very **SOUL**.

You are likely familiar with that verse that addresses the danger of too much devotion to the acquisition of wealth: *"No one can serve two masters... one cannot serve God and money."* (Mt. 6:24) And while this pandemic has caused many people around the world, and certainly in our nation, much financial hardship with a painful LACK of 'money,' I believe that many families have come to appreciate the 'acquisition of wealth' that could be accomplished in their very own homes. Of the 'treasures' right under their noses, that they were often taking for granted.

Or, the forced time away from work may have allowed more focus on another, most vital relationship... with their GOD! They were afforded time to spend with their Lord in study and prayer. Finding that which will give you the most lasting and ultimate comfort in your life is not a 401K or an IRA, but those relationships that will offer the BEST 'ROI' (Return on Investment) both in this world and the life to come: the time you spend with **friends**... with **family**... with **God** (who is BOTH 'family' and 'friend').

It is that most valuable, and exhaustible, asset of TIME that can be such a 'thorn' in our flesh. HOW DO YOU SPEND YOURS? For those of you still in full-time employment outside the home, sure, it's important to provide for yourself

and those you love and support. But if in that effort you neglect those very loved ones, and they suffer in that neglect, what have you really gained? And regardless of your work status ... as 'retired' or just 'plain tired'... the question still remains of that expenditure of time. What are you 'acquiring' with the effort and energy that you spend throughout a given day? Does it build you, and others, up? Or wear you, and others, out?

In both Matthew and Mark, Jesus asks the question ***“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?”*** (Mark 8:36, Mt. 16:26) Jesus challenges each of us to consider just what earthly treasure could ever take the place of the treasures we are storing up in heaven. Particularly the human treasures entrusted to us here whom we hope and pray to be with us there. Those 'roses'... minus the thorns... to whom we are to be examples of how to ***“Love the Lord your God with all your soul...”*** (Matthew 22:37)

And finally, there is that 'seed' of God's word that is sown on the PATH. It is here that Jesus says that when a person ***“does not understand... the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart.”*** (Matthew 13:19)

It is the importance of 'understanding' the promises of God... and the role of that 'evil one' in 'snatching away what is sown on the heart' in our journey on life's PATH... that reminds us of the need to ***“Love the Lord your God with all your MIND.”*** (Matthew 22:37)

As I thought about this relationship between understanding in the mind and that evil 'bird' pecking away at the heart, I was reminded of a book by Rev. Joyce Meyer entitled “Battlefield of the Mind.” Meyer wrote that *“The mind is a battlefield. ...So many people's problems are rooted in thinking patterns that*

actually produce the problems they experience in their lives. Satan offers wrong thinking to everyone, but we do not have to accept his offer."

Leading a life that seeks to live as a child of God... as Jesus our brother said, to **"do my Father's will"**... is not just a matter of understanding the Bible, the Word Written. It is also about understanding the Word Incarnate, the Word Made Flesh in Jesus Christ. And the battles that He waged with Satan in His time on earth. The same battle we, his brothers and sisters, wage each day. An insidious struggle in which that 'evil one' whispers 'wrong thinking to everyone.' Our mortal enemy is banking on the truth of Proverbs, that **"As a man thinks in his heart, so does he become."** (Proverbs 23:7)

You may remember those words from Romans we heard in our time of confession: **"To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."** (Romans 8:6) As you and I walk that 'path' of life on the 'dusty trail,' which can get harder and more 'compacted' with each day's steps that we take, may we not focus so much on the external factors that can make that journey so hard, but on the internal impact of the One who travels with us. Jesus, whose **"Spirit is life and peace."**

Especially for us Presbyterians, who can consider ourselves so 'learned,' let us use this 'great intellect' of ours to think daily about this 'battlefield of the mind' we carry around with us. That no matter how we might be under attack by that evil one, 'a mighty fortress is our God.' We are reminded by Paul in his letter to an oft-time 'besieged' church in Corinth, that **"The weapons of our warfare are not merely human...but divine power to destroy strongholds. ... We take every thought captive to obey Christ."** (2 Cor. 10:4-5)

We pray that our hearts will never get as 'hardened' as that path we travel;

But that by the power of God's life-giving, peace-providing Holy Spirit, we may continue to walk in understanding, every thought captive to Christ. And in so doing, we will in-truth and in-deed, ***"Love the Lord with all our mind."***

As you and I seek to be 'fertile soil' from which to 'bear fruit' in our walk with our Lord Jesus, may we be mindful of all those pitfalls to doing so: too many 'rocks' in our ground... 'thorns' in our carnal flesh... a 'path' on which evil awaits us. Through it all, take TIME to ponder how you are fulfilling Jesus' command to ***"Love the Lord your God with all your heart..."*** Like Jesus, maybe you need to 'put out from shore' in order to clear your head. And who knows...Perhaps you just might also have some fruitful, impactful 'thoughts from a 'sow-boat'...

CHARGE & BENE: You may have wondered why no further mention of the last reference, the "good soil," was made. Just as was the last way of showing our love to God, by our "strength." That is because I am leaving those with you as your 'CHARGE.' Your 'challenge,' once you leave this place, is to PRAY that God's HOLY SPIRIT give you the STRENGTH each day to be GOOD SOIL from which to BEAR FRUIT... as your brother Jesus did. And the 'good news' is... You *do NOT* do it by yourself. But by the Spirit of the Living God, who is...