The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 13, 1–23:

ESV 1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. 
  2 And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And 
  the whole crowd stood on the beach. 
  3 And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. 
  4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured 
  them.
  5 Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and 
  immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil,
  6 but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they 
  withered away.
  7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.
  8 Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty,
  some thirty.
  9 He who has ears, let him hear."

... [10-18] ...

18 "Hear then the parable of the sower:
  19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil 
  one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown 
  along the path.
  20 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and 
  immediately receives it with joy,
  21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or 
  persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.
  22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the 
  cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves 
  unfruitful.
  23 As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and 
  understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another 
  sixty, and in another thirty."

Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, give us ears that can hear the risen and ascended Lord. Amen.

Dear Congregation of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but 
water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to 
the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me 
empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for 
which I sent it.” Isaiah 55:10–11.
We hear the promise from God: Where His Word is preached it is 100% effective. It always accomplishes that which God had in mind for sending it out. This is an amazing statement! A statement which may and should encourage us to hand out the Word of God according to our vocations in private and in public, to children and to adults. Whenever it is the Word of God, sent out by God, it is effective, 100%! What a privilege to hand it out, to be part of God's distribution network, the church.

But how then does this promise of God square up with the parable of Jesus, where only one fourth yields good fruit? How does this promise of God fit to what we experience in our community and amongst ourselves? Where does Jesus point to when He gives the reasons why not all give fruit? Does He direct His disciples to repackage the word of God to make it more acceptable, more pleasing, more relevant, when fruit is lacking? Shall we ban the word "sin" and "Satan" from the church's vocabulary as many are suggesting, because these terms offend modern people?

Jesus' parable of the seed and the sower goes to the heart of these questions.

First of all we need to deal with the fact that He spoke to the huge crowd by means of a parable. A parable is a clever little story, telling earthly things which correspond with heavenly things. But, contrary to what is often said about parables, these parables are not used by Jesus to make things clearer, but to hide the real understanding. This is quite astonishing. The mystery deepens as Jesus explains why He did this: He spoke to the crowds in parables because it had not been given to them to understand. The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled here in Jesus preaching to the crowds in parables [Isa 6,9-10]: "'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

Jesus started speaking in parables because the crowds were not repenting after hearing Him proclaim the Gospel plainly. They came to Him, yes, but they made no effort whatsoever to ask Him for the right understanding of the parable. They assumed to understand or not care much at all. Parables were thus a sign of unbelief of the hearers, a form of judgement.

The crowd heard and saw Jesus, but they did not recognise who He was, what He was speaking about. Remember that in the beginning He had told them that the kingdom of God was near. He had given them His famous sermon on the mount in plain speech. They heard, but did not hear. They saw, but did not see. They only saw a pious prophet at the most. They didn't see the kingdom of God. They didn't see the Son of God amongst them, the Holy One of God dwelling in their midst.
And it is not as though they hadn't been prepared by God: They had the prophets writings. Jesus said to His disciples: "Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." Yet no repentance of whole towns happened. The only exceptions were the disciples Jesus had called. They were with Him. And they asked Him, 'Jesus why did you speak to them in parables?'. And He answered them, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given." Only to those it has been given, will understand it. And then Jesus topped this argument with the following [12]: "For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." The disciples were the only ones who would hear and understand. Why only they?

Here comes the revelation from Jesus: The seed is the Gospel of the Kingdom. That what is sown along the path is "when anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart." Hearing without understanding poses an easy target for Satan. It won't become part of you. It will be out not long after it came into your heart. Understanding what should be understood is essential. Hearing and to have insight in, belong together. Proper hearing includes to grasp what was heard. When the Gospel hits a hardened heart it just pings off it. The old Self refuses to repent of its blindness. It's a know it all.

[20-21]: "As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away." These are the ones who experience and show great joy when they receive the word. But as soon as afflictions come their way, the joy is gone and they stop hearing the Gospel. They blame the persons in the church. Many excuses are given instead of growing deeper into the word of the Kingdom. It is a highly visible but shallow reception of the word in the end. When trouble arises the ship is abandoned.

[22]: "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." The word is received. It enters the heart. It is understood, but the worries of this world choke it. It has no room and space and air to take root. The heart is crowded with the worries over money, over work, how to survive or make a better living in this world. There is no trust in the word of the Kingdom. It is sidelined and no fruit comes forth.
Now we come to the only soil which produces fruit. This is the one who hears the word and understands it—period. The word of the Kingdom is central to this heart. It is genuine good news. The soil is good. The heart is good. That is the difference. The heart is good. A good tree bears good fruit. A bad tree cannot bear good fruit. That is why Jesus said it was not given to the unfruitful to understand it. It is only given to the "little ones" to the poor in Spirit, to those who know that they don't know.

The good soil is the tilled soil, the ploughed soil, the Law of God that ploughed through the heart, that killed it. It is soft. And the ploughed heart, the killed heart, the heart that longs for the Grace of God, which does not pretend to know it all, which is not distracted by material worries, the broken heart receives the Gospel and grasps its gracefulness. It realises it's kindness coming from the heart of God our Father. Those are the disciples of Christ, who have been baptised and receive His teaching with open hearts, listening attentively. They listen with great attention, because it is their only hope in affliction.

So it is in difficult times that our hearts are softened and prepared for the Gospel. It is when we are down and out that our heart is ploughed that the seed of the Gospel can take root and grow. This is sore and unpleasant for us. But the cross is good for us.

Once again we see that it is not our doing. We cannot change our heart. Let us always be grateful that we hear the Gospel and understand it. Let us abide in Christ, because those who remain with Him are prepared for receiving the Gospel fruitfully. Let us ask Him for the proper insight. He will give it to us.

And so we see, that it is true, that God's word proclaimed always does what it was sent out for, even though it might not always produce fruit but the hardening of heart and judgement. The Gospel that is not received in the end judges the hardened heart. What happens Jesus revealed to us. Why it happens to specific persons and not to others, and for how long, is not for us to know. That we have to leave to God.

But we know, the word of God is 100% effective every time it is proclaimed publicly or privately. This should encourage us to hand it out faithfully. If the true Gospel is rejected the main problem lies with the hearts of the hearers not with the Gospel. Therefore the words of Jesus are important when He says: "He who has ears, let Him hear." Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (2 Cor 13, 14).

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