

## “Are You My Mother?”

Luke 8:4-21 • Galatians 5:16-25

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Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • September 4, 2016

How’s your hearing? I said, how’s your hearing? There was an elderly man who was getting frustrated by his wife’s hearing loss. She never seemed to hear him when he talked to her. One day he was talking this over with a friend. The friend said, “Try this. When you walk in the door this evening, ask her what’s for dinner. If she doesn’t answer, get closer and ask again. Maybe then she’ll realize that she can’t hear you.” So sure enough, when the man got home he walked in the front door and said, “honey, what’s for dinner?” No answer. So he went closer to the kitchen and asked again. Still no answer. So he walked up right behind her and asked again, “what’s for dinner?” This time his wife turned around and said, “for the THIRD TIME it’s spaghetti!”

In our reading from Luke 8, Jesus tells the familiar parable of the sower. Sometimes we are so familiar with a passage that we can miss the deeper meaning. Jesus is talking about hearing. In verse 8 he says, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Of course what he’s really talking about is *listening*. The passage begins with people coming from all over to hear Jesus speak and see him work miracles. But not everyone was listening.

We usually call this the parable of the sower but it’s really a parable of the soils. As the seed, which is the Word of God, is scattered it falls on different kinds of soil. Philip Graham Ryken, the president of Wheaton College, says, “Each soil represents a different condition of the heart, a different response to the gospel, and a different destiny.” Some people’s hearts are “hard and indifferent” toward the gospel, like the well-worn path. The Word never has a chance to sprout. Some hearts are “shallow and superficial.” When things get tough they fall away from Jesus. Some people hear the gospel but are “preoccupied and distracted.” Notice that Jesus said their faith is choked out by both their concerns—things like family and health and money—and by pleasures and riches. Both can distract us from what really matters.

The fourth kind of soil is the good soil. The ground has been plowed and prepared so that the seed has the best chance to sprout and grow and finally bear fruit. So what kind of heart is the good soil? It’s a heart that loves the Word of God. In verse 15 Jesus says, “As for that in the good soil, they are those who, *hearing* the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.”

So what kind of fruit are we talking about? “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control.” It’s also the absence of thorny weeds like “sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.” The point is that if you are growing in your faith in Christ and your love of his Word, it’s going to show in your life. People will be able to see it.

This is actually what Jesus is saying when he says, “No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light.” This is not a separate parable. Jesus is further explaining the parable of the soils. How do we know that? Jesus goes on, “Take care then how you *hear!*” Jesus is not telling us to listen to a lamp. He’s telling us that we have to use what we’ve been given or we will lose it. If you’ve ever tried to learn another language you know this is true. If you don’t regularly use the language you will lose it. Jesus is in effect saying that when we hear the gospel we have to put it into practice in our lives. You must put your faith into action. When you do, you will get more knowledge and understanding and faith. But if you don’t, even the little bit of faith and understanding you have you will lose. If you try to store your faith under the bed, when you come back for it you may find it’s not there.

If you have been around children much in the last 56 years then you are probably familiar with a book by PD Eastman called *Are You My*

*Mother?* The story is about a baby bird that hatches while his mother is off looking for food. The baby is determined to find his mother and so off he goes – walking, since he can't fly. He asks a kitten and a hen, a dog, a cow, even an old car, “are you my mother?” This last part of today's passage may seem like it doesn't belong. Jesus is teaching and his mother and brothers come by to see him. And it seems like Jesus is kind of disrespectful and maybe even confused about who his mother is. But if we look closely we will see that this, too, is part of the same message. Jesus said, “My mother and my brothers are those who *hear* the word of God and do it.”

In the book, the baby bird recognizes his mother because she's a bird and does what birds do. Jesus recognizes his followers because we do what Christians do. We love. We are joyful. We have a certain peace even when things are difficult. Especially when things are difficult. Remember, we are following a “suffering savior.”

In the parable, seed landed on each type of soil. The good news of Jesus is available for everyone to hear and lots of people hear God's Word. What really matters, though, is how you respond. What are you going to do with it? A heart that benefits from the Word is one that is ready to receive it. What are you doing to prepare yourself to hear God's Word? Are you taking time every day to prune away the thorns and pull the weeds that can choke out your faith? Are you hearing the Word every day? Are you making the effort to understand it, to reflect on what it means in your life? Every time you read or hear Scripture you should try to find out how it applies to your life today.

The way you know how you're doing in your faith is whether you are producing fruit. The way to produce fruit is to respond to God's Word, to cultivate the soil of your soul. Then let your light shine. So let me ask you again, how's your hearing? Better yet, show me.

*Amen.*