

Seeds and Soil

Al Sterling | First Presbyterian Church of Maitland | November 26, 2006
Matthew 13:1-9 and 18-23

(Play Rocky montage- approx. 2 min.)

Good morning.

Don't you just love a montage? They stir your soul a little, don't they? It's that point in the movie where you know you're getting to the good part. The good guy is going to come back, and he's going to win.

I love movies. Not just movies though- I love going to the theatre. The popcorn is SO good. I could sit down and eat an entire Thanksgiving dinner, drive directly to a theatre, complaining the whole way about how STUFFED I am, but the moment I walk into the lobby and I smell that popcorn, I'm hungry again. I love the sounds, the feeling, the whole movie experience.

Ya know, I think if we were to make a movie of our church, and from what I can tell Rob Collins isn't far off, I think this is the part of our movie where the montage is going full swing. The music is playing, and everything is starting to happen faster. You see us working harder, falling, getting up, and doing better the next time. It's a great time to be a part of this church.

But let's try to take our little Rocky moment and take a closer look at it. Before a montage can start, what has to happen? Well, first we have to get knocked down, and then we need that moment where the camera does a close up, sometimes so close all we can see are the eyes, and then we say something really cool, like "I'll show you dedication," or "You have no idea what I'm capable of," or "Imagine the possibilities". Our church stood there, said that cool line, and the music started playing.

Unfortunately, it doesn't always go that way in life. Sometimes, we get knocked down and we don't seem to be able to get back up. Sometimes the music doesn't play. Sometimes we can't even think of a cool line.

Why does this happen? What separates those times? What is it that lets some people start their montages, and others just lie there? I think our answer lies in our scripture reading.

Jesus loved parables. I'm always so impressed with people who can do this. Someone asks a question, brings up some really difficult point, and the other person responds with some story that seems pointless, but after a moment becomes some really huge insightful moment. Jesus did this with his parables. It drove people nuts. (**illustrate**)

So here we have the parable of the sower. It's probably the most often used of Jesus' parables, and with good reason. There are at least fifty different lessons we could learn from this one simple story. And yes, you're about to hear one of those lessons.

Look at what all the different places the seeds fell had in common. All received the same seed. All of the different areas got it around the same time. The places were even close to each other. They were tossed by the same hand, had the same sun, the same weather. As a matter of fact, there is only one real difference in any of our locations. The soil.

Explain Scripture more. Only we can control how we react to our surroundings. We have the capacity to act well, or to act badly. We make the decision whether we allow

the weeds. And that's our moment of truth, ladies and gentlemen. When those seeds hit the ground, that's the moment when we'll know whether or not our soil is in good shape.

Personally, though, I think we help determine the chances of those seeds long before they are thrown. Rocky did a lot of boxing before that montage. He was conditioning his body, preparing his soil. So when he was down, when it was his moment of truth, he had a good chance of being able to deliver that cool line and start that music.

Our church is the same way. I firmly believe our soon-to-be interim was chosen for us by the Good Lord. Our poor Interim Search Committee had door after door close on them. They had to be discouraged. But as they hunted, we were preparing our soil. We were coming together; we were forging a path for ourselves. We managed to stare a massive capital campaign right in the eye, and come out very well. The Lord sent us our interim now because we weren't ready before now.

But let's make this a little more personal. How is your soil doing?

My mom must have had a dozen little sayings that she taught me. Well, "taught" is being a little generous. Pounded into me might be a little more accurate. If it's not yours don't touch it. Timing is everything. It's not what you say; it's how you say it. For me, it didn't matter how my soil was. My mother was going to just keep dumping seed until the soil was good. Actually, it might be more accurate to say that she broke the soil, and then buried the seeds. Lord help me if they didn't take root. But that's a parent's job. Assist the young ones in preparing their own soil. Hopefully, there are others around to reinforce what the parent is trying to do.

As adults, however, we must take responsibility for our own soil. The Lord has blessings waiting for us, ready for us, but to truly appreciate all The Lord is doing, we must first make sure we have a heart that is open, a heart that is ready. Only then are going to be able to do something with the incredible gifts the Lord gave us.

So with all this talk of preparing soil, it only seems appropriate to talk a little about how we actually go about doing that.

The first step is spending time with the Lord. That means praying and spending time reading the bible. It's a lot easier said than done, but we have to remember that the Lord doesn't sit and wait for us to make it to Him, He comes to us where we are. He wants to help us till the ground, to get ready.

Now while prayer and bible is the necessary first step, the key to finding the discipline to maintain that is often found in the relationships with our fellow Christians. We are built and designed to be with other people. That doesn't mean you love to be surrounded by hundreds of people all the time. Some only need one or two others, and that's fine. The important thing isn't how many people, just that there *are* people. That is what has made the church so important all these years. And as we live in a society that seems to be increasingly sectionalized and independent, the church's role as a meeting place becomes even more important.

We have here at First Presbyterian Church of Maitland some incredible opportunities to do this. Dr. Art Cross, our Family Life Consultant, offers some wonderful seminars completely free. Our adult education program offers such a wide variety of activities and opportunities it's almost overwhelming. But our soil preparation has to go beyond sitting in a classroom. In order to be able to really begin to see the potential, to really begin to prepare our soil, we have to serve. Christ spelled it out in John 13, when he tells the disciples that the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

We cannot truly begin to prepare our soil until we begin to serve one another. The opportunities and needs in our church are numerous. It is my hope and prayer that the next segment of our montage will be even more of our congregation joining the ranks of our already fantastic and hardworking volunteers. There has been a constant cry from the congregation for small groups to make a comeback, but a drastic shortage of people willing to lead them. Our children's ministry, which has been working exclusively under volunteer power for a while now, is in need of fresh blood to provide relief for those who have been working and sacrificing so much for the sake of our children. Whether you're outgoing, shy, musical, technical, or anything else, there is an opportunity and a need for you.

And so, my friends, we have this decision to make. How will we prepare our own soil? How will we prepare ourselves for our own moment? And when it's time, when it's time for our montage, how will we respond? We have come so far in so short a time as a church. It has been so exciting to be a part of all the things going on, and I can't wait to see what the Lord has in store for us next. **Wrap up- soil and scripture ref.**

Let us pray.