

A Sermon for Sexagesima, February 8, 2026
The Epistle, 2 Corinthians 11:19-31 - The Gospel, St. Luke 8:4-15
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The ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience (Lk. 8:15).

How we understand the meaning and goal of life

One major barrier to spiritual growth is the temptation to look at life from the wrong perspective with the wrong standards of measurement. The main errors of our time are to look at and assess everything in economic and consumer terms. The economic assessments center on cost and profit. The consumer assessments focus on personal happiness and satisfaction. In contrast, the Bible assesses everything in terms of growth into the image of Christ, which is reflected in the growth of virtues like faith, hope, and love. This process of growth is referred to as “bearing fruit.”

Not all economic and consumer assessments are inherently bad. However, there is a critical distinction between whether a thing is profitable and popular and whether a thing is actually good. There is a critical distinction between one's immediate subjective reaction to a thing and the long-term impact of the thing on one's growth and formation. For example, for me potato chips are always more immediately satisfying—they produce more instant happiness—than vegetables; but vegetables contribute more to long term health. In a similar way, spiritual formation requires that we learn to embrace things that are not as immediately satisfying because they are beneficial and formative over the long term.

The long-term focus of the Parable of the Sower and the Seed

The Parable of the Sower and the Seed in today's gospel is the parable with which Jesus began his parable teaching ministry. In this parable, Jesus stated his purpose for teaching in parables. He said, "To you (the disciples) it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.'" Parables are secrets that not everyone immediately understands. Understanding is given to those who have the faith to pursue the true meaning, and who won't stop pursuing truth because it is hard.

Jesus was not just being difficult. He was not rewarding the mere consumer. The disciples heard the parable and did not understand it. But they made the effort to

approach Jesus and ask him to explain it. Most of the crowd that followed Jesus, by contrast, heard the story, didn't understand it, and stopped following Jesus eventually as a result. When following became difficult and required effort, many stopped following.

Genuine faith perseveres in the pursuit of knowing God. As Jesus said in Luke 11:9-11, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." This promise is the conclusion to a parable about perseverance in prayer. It is not a consumer promise. It doesn't say, "Ask and you will be given next day delivery." It says, "Continue asking for however long is necessary." Eventually, as your faith is shown to be genuine by your perseverance, you will begin to receive and find and the door will begin to open.

This long term framework is assumed in the Parable of the Sower and the Seed. Plants take time to grow. They must be tended and protected from predators, weeds, and weather. If you plant seed like a consumer and expect flowers or fruit in a short time, without any effort, you will be disappointed.

This suggests that we should not assess our practice of the faith in terms of whether it makes us feel good in any given moment. Rather, the concern should be whether our practice of the faith is producing what Galatians calls the fruit of the Spirit: "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (5:22-23). Short term experiences of pleasure or dissatisfaction should be assessed by how they relate to the long term goals.

For example, we may be going through season of visible struggle, but God will use that season to cultivate new virtues and purify our hearts. Virtue is the long-term fruit of patient endurance through struggle. If we always demand immediate satisfaction, the fruit of genuine virtue will never be produced in us.

This pertains to our experience of church. My personal opinion about the music or the sermon on a given Sunday is a bad measure of what God is doing within me. My unfavorable momentary experience can teach me patience, forbearance, and love—if I seek those virtues rather than mere comfort and personal satisfaction.

The challenge of reorientation and the opportunity of Lent

We can easily critique the consumer and economic assessment of things. However, we are all influenced by it. It is ‘in the air’ of our culture. Consequently, it takes a committed effort to retrain ourselves and learn a new perspective. When we don’t like something we encounter, we must practice taking a breath and considering how we might grow by purposely working through the uncomfortable thing with grace and patience. We must learn to look past surface numerical assessments and focus on God’s interior work in our hearts.

The parable highlights two dangers we can focus on in the upcoming season of Lent. First, the seed on the rocky soil fell away in time of temptation. It was not able to faithfully persevere through a season of uncomfortable testing in service to the long-term goal of growth. Second, the seed among the thorns was overwhelmed by the pleasures and cares of life. It was so caught up in its immediate happiness and satisfaction that it lost sight of God and his kingdom. It gained the world and lost its soul. These seeds highlight the truth that having too little or too much happiness or profit are both potential distractions from the goal and telos of growing in the Spirit as move toward the resurrection and the life of the world to come.

Pre-lent focuses our attention on the long-term goal of Easter. Easter is not merely a future feast day. Easter is a new experience of resurrection that we enter through a new experience of the cross. Our cross is the horticultural work we embrace in Lent. Lent is not just about “giving things up” or “saying more prayers”—although we need to fast and pray. A good Lent reorients life away from the idolatry of focusing on economic gain and personal comfort and toward worship, prayer, and love for others in Jesus’ name. As Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33)."

We should consider over the next nine days what is needed for the seed of God’s work to become more deeply rooted in our hearts. Lent will give us an opportunity for extended horticultural work towards the goal of long-term growth. As Jesus said in conclusion to our parable, “The ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.”