

Sermon Title: **“Fertilizer Needed?”**

Bible: **Psalm 119:105-112 & Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

When: on Sunday, July 16, 2023

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, we come to you, because you wait for us, embrace us, and love us! Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Jesus Loves Me?

What is your favorite hymn? My favorite hymn is “Jesus Loves Me!” It is in our hymnal, and its number is 191. I have loved this hymn since I was a very young kid in Sunday School in Korea. I will sing it in Korean: “예수 사랑하심은 거룩하신 말일세. 우리들은 약하나, 예수 권세 많도다. 날 사랑하심, 날 사랑하심, 날 사랑하심, 성경에 써 있네.” There are a lot of stories on my journey from a young kid to this adult. I still love this hymn, not only from when I was a kid, but also as an adult with a deep and profound experience. That’s because the Bible tells me so.

Because I was born into a Christian family, the church was like my playground. Even though I cannot remember all the details, I know that Sunday School teachers and pastors loved me. I just loved the church. At that time, I was like good soil. I absorbed everything

that I learned from the church. I loved Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Youth Group, and Bible Study. But I was not always like good soil.

When I grew up, I learned that the world is not like the church. I believe in God, but not all people believe in God. I learned that there are good people and bad people, too. I learned that bad things can happen even to good people. Unfortunately, this is not only in the world, but also in the church. In the church, bad things can happen. We can meet many types of people in the church, good and bad. Sometimes, we can be surprised by the church, in a good way and in a bad way, too. We can be disappointed because of the church. We can be hurt by the church. Then, our minds can be like being on the path, on rocky ground, or among thorns.

Have you been to these places before? I used to be in these places before. God's love might stay the same, and God's word might be present. But my responses were like these: "No, thank you!" "I am not ready," "I need more time," or "I do not want to listen." Furthermore, I could not understand God's love. If God loves me, how could God send me to this broken world? How could God be absent and silent in my suffering? I could not feel any of God's love in my life, or even in the church. My mind was just like the path and the rocky ground. It had many thorns.

2. Why Different Places?

Have you wondered why the sower plants the seeds in different places? Why did the sower waste the seeds on the path, on the rocky ground, and among thorns? If the sower planted the seeds only in the good soil, there would have been no waste and more fruits. But the sower

did not stop planting the seeds in all different places. The sower did it somewhat unconditionally. Can we understand the sower's mind and his plan?

I believe that the sower starts out to take care of not only the good soil, but also the other places. This is not recorded in the Bible, but based on my experience, this is my interpretation and my understanding. A scarecrow needs to be set up to frighten birds away from the seeds. If there are thorns, the farmworkers will come to take them out. To remove the thorns is not easy. Even with gloves, their hands can be hurt due to the sharp thorns. If there are rocks, the rocks are taken away. The ground needs to be plowed up. It might require two cows using a yoke. It takes time and energy! But this is how to help make good soil. A bad workman might blame his tools. But the farmer cannot complain about the land.

3. Fertilizer Needed?

God's love and grace is unconditional and overflowing. This is what I experience in my faith journey. I have met many fertilizers. I define the fertilizers as the ones who make me into good soil. Have you met any scarecrows in your faith journey? When you are lost, and when you feel alone, is there anyone who is like a scarecrow, who stands next to you and tells you that you are not alone? Is there any scarecrow who tells you that you belong to God and that you are God's child? Is there anyone who helps to remove your rocks? When you are in trouble, who is there with you? Is there anyone who is patient and who loves you, even though you have your own weakness and immaturity?

We cannot see God. But God's word is with us. Jesus is with us. And God's people are with us. I hope that we have the blessing of meeting many of God's people, who are the fertilizers, who make us the good soil. And I also hope that we can be the fertilizers to each other. May God's word and love, God's unconditional love, be with all of us and bear fruit more and more. Then, we might praise the Lord, like Psalm 119!

I would like to close my message with the last verse of the hymn "Jesus Loves Me." "Jesus loves [you] still today, walking with [you] on [your] way, wanting as a friend to give light and love to all who live. Yes, Jesus loves [you]! Yes, Jesus loves [you]! Yes, Jesus loves [you]! The Bible tells [us] so."

Closing Prayer

O Lord, in our lives, we are so busy that we forget your love. Sometimes, when we are in trouble, we doubt your presence. When we are alone, when we are weak, please help us to open our eyes to see your grace. Please guide us to become good soil and to become fertilizers to each other. Please lead us to walk with you. In Jesus' name. Amen.