

***Beyond These Walls: Here We Go
Gimme the Dirt!***

Mark 4:1-9

I have a shed with a latch that looks like this. It's the kind that automatically latches when the door shuts. This week, I was working inside my shed when a gust of wind caught the door.... and blew it shut. And the latch engaged perfectly. And I was locked inside. And I think my wife must be deaf. Because I stood there...in the dark...(I have no electricity in my shed)...shouting for Cyndi. I shout loudly...but I might as well have been screaming into my pillow. Nothing! Ah...but then I remembered I had planned for this eventuality! I had drilled a hole and run a line through the hole tied to the latch so that if one was trapped inside ...one could get oneself out. I felt around, found the line, pulled on it...and it broke.

So there I was...trapped like a rat...screaming until I was hoarse...wondering how long it would be before Cyndi noticed I had disappeared. When I finally came to grips with the fact that my unborn grandchildren might be the ones who discover my skeletal remains, I put my shoulder to the door and broke out. I like my shed...a lot... like most men. But sheds aren't for staying inside; sheds are for equipping us for the work that must be done outside.

Two years ago, your elders said that the church is not built for staying inside; it is built for the work that must be done outside. We launched a giving initiative called "Beyond These Walls." Our goal was to eliminate \$5 million of debt and free up about \$600,000 per year. The vision was to move out from behind our beautiful walls like never before. It wasn't your typical "sexy" campaign because, at the end of the day, we wouldn't have a fancy new building to show for it. It was very outwardly focused...and honestly, I wasn't sure how you'd respond! But respond you did! You loved the vision of busting out the doors and moving into our region in new ways. Beyond These Walls was the most successful giving initiative we'd ever had. And it deserves to be celebrated.

So this evening/morning, I have two big celebratory announcements for you; the first one now and the second later (just to keep your attention!) Again, two years ago, we had how much debt? \$5 million. As of this weekend, with one year to go, that number stands at \$1,891,732. Isn't that wonderful? I am so grateful and so proud of you and so excited that our debt number has a "1" in front of it! Way to go, Chapel Hill!

Although we are one year away from paying off that last dollar, your elder board is already laying plans for what happens after we burn the last of our three mortgages. We are excited to share some of those plans with you over the next couple weeks! And to lay the groundwork, let's turn to Mark 4: 1-9.

Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the

land. And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

This is the largest single teaching of Jesus in Mark's gospel. In fact, this is only half of it. Later in chapter 4, Jesus interprets the meaning of this parable to his disciples. He explains that the soils represent the various ways that people receive the word of God. The seeds on the pathway represent those under spiritual attack; the word gets snatched up by the Devil before it has a chance to root. The hardpan represents those who receive the word with joy but it has no depth; when hard times come, they immediately shrivel up. The thorny soil represents those so caught up in the ways of this world that the gospel gets choked out. And of course, there is the good soil that yields a bountiful harvest.

Many sermons on this passage end up as a kind of spiritual soils test. Each listener is urged to assess what kind of soil they are. Are you the pathway covered with demonic birds... or the hard soil that produces wimpy roots...or the thorny soil that gets choked out by all the distractions of this world? OR are you good, rich, fertile soil?

Listen, an honest assessment of our fruitfulness as a disciple of Jesus is a good thing. But really...it misses the main point of this parable. We call this the parable of the sower. The constant in every case is the sower...and what. The seed.

Jesus later defines the seed as the Word. The "word" is the good news...the gospel of Jesus. It is the proclamation that God loves the world and sent his son to show that love. It is the announcement that no one is beyond the reach of God's love; that everyone who trusts Jesus... who seeks his forgiveness...will be saved and can live a fruitful life. When Jesus used the word "word," that's what he means. And here, it's the seed.

Now how does the sower distribute the seed in this story? Like this, right? Carefully planting each seed in nice, neat rows. Doing his best to make sure that not a single seed is wasted. Being frugal... because seed is expensive and limited. Is that how the sower sows?

NO! THIS is how the sower sows. Generously...extravagantly... liberally...lavishly...wastefully... prodigally.

The prudent manager would protest that such indiscriminate flinging of seed is wasteful! You will notice that three-quarters of the soil types described are inhospitable. Not good odds. You ought to be more cautious, more frugal about where you plant your seed.

But the sower is not interested in frugality; he is interested in casting the seed into every corner of the land in hope that something great might happen. Because...and here is the point...this is a work

of God. Hundred-fold harvests? That was unheard of! The only way you get a hundred-fold harvest was by God's special blessing. The job of the sower then, is not to play it close to the vest; not to play it safe. The sower's job is to throw caution to the wind...along with the seed...and watch what God might do!

So...who is the sower? Well...Jesus, right? But also...everyone who is compelled by the Spirit of Jesus to spread his word. This parable is a call for the people of Jesus to take the word of Jesus and fling it extravagantly so that the Spirit of Jesus will cause it to take root and produce the harvest for Jesus that God desires.

Now I want to be careful with this. This is only one parable. There are other parables that speak about planning, about stewardship, about being wise in the ways of the Kingdom. We selected Port Orchard for our church plant because we think it will be fertile. But THIS parable calls us to take risks, to throw ourselves into areas that may not seem obviously fruitful... in the expectation that God will produce his great harvest.

I think this captures the heart of Beyond These Walls that captured YOUR heart! The willingness to bust down some doors, to move out of our comfort zone, to take some wild-haired risks. Not because we can confidently predict a great return on investment ... but because that is the nature of the gospel. Wild, untamed, risky and unpredictable.

Two years ago when we talked about doubling down on our commitments beyond these walls, I spoke specifically about FISH Food Bank. 43 years ago, Jan Coen felt led to pull together the churches of the Peninsula to care for the hungry and the poor. For 43 years, FISH has been casting the seed of love, kindness, generosity and hope without regard to person. FISH has been unapologetic about its commitment to Jesus...even as they have offered help to any person who needs it, regardless of who or what they are or believe. It is pure gospel. And we are honored to have Ron and Jan Coen here with us this evening/morning. These are Gig Harbor heroes; would you welcome them!

You proudly display the ICHTUS Fish on your logo. That's an ancient Christian symbol. In a culture that is distancing itself from Christianity, you have not. Why?

You do more than distribute food, don't you? What else does FISH do?

You have some big plans for your future, don't you? Tell us about that.

What will your new building allow you to do?

Chapel Hill has been partnered with FISH for a long time. We feel like your organization epitomizes a Christ-centered commitment to love its community...to spread the word of God's love extravagantly. You are a perfect illustration of Beyond These Walls. The elders of our church are excited to tell you...that Chapel Hill is making a lead pledge to your new building of \$100,000. When we have paid off our debt, you will be one of our first Beyond These Walls investments. We want this to be a matching gift and we will present this challenge to other churches in our community to join with us.

Chapel Hill, I hope this excites you. This is a huge dream for FISH...and we want to be a part of it, don't we?

The call of the gospel is NOT to play it safe...not to play things close to the vest. Christ calls us to risk! To take chances. To dream dreams bigger than we can accomplish and watch as God brings a harvest we could never imagine.

That is what Beyond These Walls is about. And this is just a start. In one more year, because of your generosity, we will begin scatter the seed of the gospel across our region like never before.

Jan, would you please pray for us?