

“Out of the Abundance of the Heart”

Luke 6: 43-45

As I lived with this text this past week, I thought, “This will be the shortest sermon ever!” Sure the verses make up only two lines and they already sum up the Gospel message on their own, so really what more can I add? Good trees bear good fruit; bad trees bear bad fruit. So ultimately our lesson this morning should be we all need to be good trees, right?

But I will tell you this answer and this message seems too simple for our complex world. All I could think about was: Is Luke really trying to say to us that the world can be divided up into two categories: bad people and good people. And if he is saying this: why does this answer turn my stomach? What about the basic starting point of faith, a starting point which Jesus taught us, the starting point of faith that says all are beloved children of God, made in the image of God? How does this fit in with Luke’s message? Is Luke right? Can it really be as simple as saying that there are bad people as compared to good people? Is it really that black and white?

The answer I’ve come to discover as I have continued my journey of faith is that things are never as black and white as they may seem. Life tends to be more

gray than simply black and white. In my experience, people are never completely good nor are they completely bad. We are all there, somewhere in the middle. Because let's face it: We all have our moments where nasty mean thoughts flow through our minds and we've all had our moments where our first reaction is one of compassion. Our lives, our emotions, our experiences are much more complicated than simply black and white.

So, for the thought process behind this sermon, I went back to my starting point as a person of faith to try to find out if Luke and I could find some common ground. So here is what I believe: I honestly believe that no one is created evil. I believe that all people are inherently good. I also believe that It is our choices that lead us to do bad things. It is our choices or lack of choices that shape us in to "bad" people. And I also believe the same can be said of the other direction. I also believe that is our choices that lead us to do good things. It is our choices or abundance of choices that shape us into "good" people.

As I have continued my faith journey, this is where I try to start from each and every day, where I try to start from with each new person that I encounter, with each new experience that I have in my life. I try to start from the belief that all people are beloved children of God, made in the image of God and that it is the choices that we make in our lives that can either lead us away from God or towards God.

Knowing all this, as I continued to reflect on these two verses of Scripture, I realized that Luke and I weren't saying different things. We were simply approaching the same belief from different angles.

The common ground that Luke and I came up with is that we are all faced with the same question each and every day: In what soil are we as people of faith planting our roots, the soil of the world where greed, power and might nurture and feed us or are we planting our roots in the soil of God's abundance where God's grace and love encourage us to thrive and grow? Because the choices we make in this shape our journeys and make all the difference on how we experience and view life.

Or let me say it another way: As you may know, we have started a garden in the parsonage backyard. And I have no shame in admitting, that it has been a little more complicated than I expected. I thought, we would just dump in a little soil, throw in some seeds and then sit back and wait! Boy was I ever wrong!

I went to a class at the Cooperative Extension on tomatoes and peppers and soon realized that I was in over my head. They were talking about nutrients and fertilizers, PH balance and growing condition and I realized that my thought of an easy summer project just went out the window!

I must have had a glazed look of fear on my face because the instructor said, “Don’t worry-even if you are a beginner, you can do this. It is not as complicated as it sounds. You just have to pay attention to the soil in which you are putting plants. You want rich and nurturing soil so that the plants will thrive and grow.

When she shared this, I couldn’t help but think that is exactly what we mean when we talk about the conditions for our spiritual growth and how we develop our relationship with God.

We know we are called to bear the fruit of the Kingdom of God, fruit like peace, joy, love, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness. And for us to do that, for us to bear the fruit of the Kingdom of God, otherwise known as “good fruit”, we must pay attention to where we plant our roots. We must pay attention to what nurtures us and feeds us.

If we plant ourselves in this world, we will bear bad fruit. Now please don’t hear me say, that I believe that the world is completely bad. I’m just not naïve enough to believe that love and grace are the powers that guide this world. I’ve seen enough in my lifetime to know that is not true. This world is not set up to help us thrive and grow simply because our world is based on competition. Our world is based on getting ahead, no matter what the cost. Our world is based on filling the quota. And the only fruits that can come to fruition from this type of soil is greed,

hurt, and brokenness. And these types of fruit are definitely not of the Kingdom of God.

But on the other hand, if we plant ourselves and root ourselves in the abundance of compassion, in God's grace and love, just as Jesus taught us to do, we will bear good fruit. We will bear fruit of the Kingdom of God. It is this type of fruit that brings healing and wholeness not only for ourselves but for all God's creation as well. This is the type of fruit that we are called to bring forth through our words and our actions. And we can do this by simply choosing to root ourselves, to plant ourselves in the rich, nurturing soil of God's grace and God's love.

We've all heard the saying it is not what you say that matters but what you do that matters most. And we've also heard the phrase: words are easy but actions are hard. These may just be phrases that we say over and over again but the fact is that these phrases tend to be true.

But we have to realize that these phrases are based on experiences of this world, a world where we have to prove ourselves over and over again. These phrases tell us that we have to prove ourselves worthy.

But in just a few verses, Luke changes that. He reminds us that we don't have to prove anything to anybody simply because as people of faith, as people

grounded and rooted in God's love and grace, our actions, our words and more importantly our very character will show that we are worthy, not because of anything we do but because of what God does through us. Everything, our words, our actions, the fruit we bear, everything should flow from the center of our being and as disciples of Christ, that center of our being should be God.

Now, once again, this is easy for me to say. It is easy to hear these words in a loving and supporting environment as this community of faith but I also things get more complicated when we leave this place and experience the world. As I said before, everything is not black and white in our lives. Certain situations, certain people, certain experiences can easily make us forget that our starting point should always be acknowledging that everyone is a beloved child of God, made in the image of God.

And here is something else we all know. Eventually, sooner or later, words and actions whether we mean them to or not, sooner or later, words and actions will reveal what someone's true character really is. We just hope that by reflecting the light and love of God, we will show the presence of God. And for the times we don't, we know that we are not perfect and that there is always grace.

We can try do the best we can as we go through life by simply remembering and reminding ourselves just what our character is supposed to reflect. It is our

hope that Our character at all times will reflect that we know we are beloved children of God and that we are called to share that love with all of God's creation.

And If we are rooted in and grounded in God's love and grace at all times, than our words and our actions will flow from this always. The thing we need to remember and realize that the most common evidence of the presence of God is our lives, is our way of being in this world. We, as the people of God, as the Body of Christ here on earth, are the most common evidence of the presence of God, not for ourselves but for our world as well.

What Luke is telling us in just these two simple lines is that discipleship should be more than a cosmetic alteration. It should be more than just removing the layer of dust from the façade we show the world.

Being a disciple of Christ needs to be about getting in touch with the piece of our Creator that resides in us and adopting an abundance of compassion and grace just like Jesus showed us and taught us to do when he was here on earth.

As people of faith, what we are called to do in every situation is bear good fruit and live out of the abundance of God's grace and God's love in all that we do and say. We are called, in every situation, to bear fruit like joy, peace, love, faithfulness, gentleness, compassion and kindness because sometimes in a world

that is complicated and confusing, that is what will truly help us thrive, grow and become the person God created us to be.

As disciples of Christ, sometimes the only way people experience God is through us as the Body of Christ here on earth, so we constantly need to be aware of where we are rooted, constantly aware of what is nourishing us, constantly aware of choices we make.

Because where we root plant ourselves makes all the difference.

May we always find ourselves firmly planted and rooted in the soil of God's love and grace, bearing the good fruit of the Kingdom of God. Amen.