

It's taken me a few years, but I finally figured out why it rains almost every day in the summer. This may be one of those "duh" moments where every third grader thinks, "I knew that". It rains here in the summer afternoons because we're surrounded by water and it gets hot. See, as the gulf water warms up, it gets close the air temperature. Starting about sun up, the gulf waters evaporate up into the sky. After several hours of water vapor rising, it finally gets too heavy and the water falls back down. See, it's physics and gravity.

It has nothing to do with when I wash my car or when I schedule a picnic. It's not Murphy's law, it's nature's. Whew, one less thing to feel guilty about. Rain or the lack of rain is not my fault.

All kidding aside, rain is an incredible part of God's creation. As Isaiah says, rain falls down and doesn't go back up until it has done what it is supposed to do, get everything wet. It provides the hydrogen and oxygen that plants need to grow. It replenishes the aquifers and watering holes to slake the thirst of animals of all kinds. And then it seeps into the ground, leeches into the ground water and eventually ends up, depleted in it's life giving content, to reform in the clouds and do it all over again. It's a cycle. It's part of the incredible rhythm of life.

In the 5th chapter of Matthew's gospel, he reminds us that God "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous." If you're outside and it rains, you're going to get wet regardless of how good or bad a person you might be.

So, to apply this to the story in the 13th chapter of Matthew, rain is going to fall on the seed regardless of where it happens to have fallen, path, rock, thorns or good soil. It's all going to get wet. It's all going to receive the nurturing drench. It would be different if Jesus had said

that some seed fell in Lebanon and some fell in the middle of the Sahara desert, but he didn't. The farmer tossed seed into the wind and it landed where it would right there in the farmer's field.

Same seed. Same climate. Same rain. Different results. It was the quality of the receiving soil that made a difference. It's kind of logical. Jesus tells us to build on rock and to plant in good soil. Pretty straight forward advice.

For years, I have always read the parable and it's explanation from the perspective of the seed. The bumper sticker slogan of "bloom where you're planted" always comes to mind. Last time I preached on this passage, back in 1999, I spoke from the perspective of the sower – kind of an evangelism message.

But right now, for some reason, I'm seeing through a different lens. I think Jesus is comparing us, individually and as a community, to the soil. Again, for some of you that may be a "duh" concept. But I'll take my little breakthroughs where ever I can get them.

Are we so worn down that we fall prey to evil and death? Are we so shallow that our faith is based on constant stimulation? Are we so involved with the world that our faith is a hobby? Or, are we receptive to the message of God's love in and through Jesus Christ and at the same time to be tilled and fertilized and ready to receive the Word of God.

Isaiah, in a poetry that is best sung, I think, tells us about God's Word that falls to the earth, nurtures and drenches the seed and then goes back to the one who spoke, just like rain.

Christians have for centuries seen Isaiah as foretelling the coming of Christ. In the earliest days of Christianity, God the Son was referred to as the Logos, the Word of God.. John, in the first chapter of his incredible Gospel, tells us that "in the beginning was the Word and the

Word was with God and the Word was God.” Jesus the Christ, the only Son of God was and is the Word spoken from the mouth of God. It was this Word that brought life to the dust and clay that was humankind. It is the Word that saves us and holds us and nurtures us.

It is Jesus Christ that came from heaven, did God’s purpose on earth and returned to the One who Spoke us all into existence.

That Word, that rain of salvation, falls on us regardless of where in the field of human existence we find ourselves. And, I think that unlike dirt, we move back and forth from path to field to thorn-bush to rock and rubble. Regardless of where we are this day, God’s Word falls on us and brings us life.

It is up to us whether that Holy Rain produces grain, or simply runs off into the aquifer of unused grace.

In Jesus’ analogy, the pathway is hard and the seed can not work its way into the soil. It doesn’t catch on. We are the pathway when we refuse to understand. When we refuse to grasp the message of God’s love. It is so easy to be led into sin and death. There are so many false Messiah’s, false ideals, false teachings that it is fairly easy to be picked off by the birds of evil. We need to loosen up our shell, our hardness and allow Jesus’ peace and grace and love burrow it’s way into our very souls so that as the Holy Rain falls on us, the seeds of faith can find the soil it needs to grow, safe from the feeding frenzy of the buzzards of hell.

Sometimes, we are like rocky ground. We have a lot of faith, but it’s not real deep. It is easily challenged and easily lost. I see this a lot. People have an experience of God that rocks their very soul. But that kind of enthusiasm is hard to maintain. Sometimes people think being

a Christian means that life will be free of pain. When they find out that pain rains on the just and unjust, like grace, they question. They doubt. They accuse God of not caring. And the unholy rain muddies their soul and faith floats away.

A lot of us find ourselves in the thorn bush. I always think of the Song of the South, as offensive as that may be to some. Rabbit wants to be tossed into the briar patch because it is safer there. Some times it does seem easier to live in the midst of the thorns. People can't get in and hurt us. We don't have to face the realities of life because we are safe from predators.

But the truth is, the thorns we surround ourselves with, wealth, power, connections, keep the light and the grace from penetrating our soul. All those things that seem so bright and shiny out in the world become our prison. And we wither and die from the inside out.

Sometimes, and far too seldom, we find ourselves well tilled, full of nitrogen and potassium, clear of weeds, soft and able to be penetrated. And the Holy Rain, the Word of God falling upon us, the message of hope and peace and life that is the Gospel of Christ, drenches us and the seed of faith is planted and nurtured and it grows.

Fertile ground yields produce, as Jesus says, many, many times over. Fertile ground is made when it is cared for. I've never been a farmer, but Kari's family has. I know from watching them how hard it is to create an environment fit for seed.

It can be just as hard for us to prepare the field which is ourselves, our souls and bodies, for the coming of the Word of God, Jesus our Lord and our Savior. It is a conscious effort on our part to be receptive to Jesus' love.

The path, the rock and the briar patch are all seductive and interesting in their own ways. They're easier than getting up at dawn to plow the hard ground until sunset. There are easier ways to make money. There are better ways to become powerful. There are more attractive ways to live. But ultimately, it is the hard working farmer that not only feeds himself, but the world.

See, and this is a whole sermon in itself, the rain isn't falling just for our benefit. The rain falls on us so that we can bloom and produce fruit containing seed that will fall to the ground, be picked up by the wind and will fall on other fields, paths, bushes and rock.

God's love is not for us to hoard like rainwater in a barrel. It is given to us so that we can give it to others until that day when all the earth is a fertile field nurtured by the Holy Rain of God's Word, Jesus Christ, our Lord.