

Sermon Title: "Keeping Your Connection"

Biblical Passage: Mark 4:1-9, 13-20

Passage Background and Summary

Within this passage, Jesus is preaching from the boat on the sea to a crowd on the shore. He is telling what is often referred to as "The Parable of the Sower." There is a sower or farmer who sows seed. Some fall "on the path" and are eaten by the birds. Some fall on "rocky ground" where there is little soil. They are scorched by the sun and "withered away" because they "had no root." Some seed falls among the thorns and are choked out. Still, other seed falls on good soil, grows, and continues to increase. Jesus then explains the scripture to them. The seed is the word. The ones on the path are those for whom Satan takes away the word. Those on rocky ground hear it, "receive it with joy," but it doesn't last in tough times because "they have no root." The seed among thorns represents those "who hear the word," but it is choked out by the cares of the world. Seed that falls among good soil are those who "hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

Sermon Points

We live in a wired world and a virtual time that is magnified by this pandemic. We buy groceries online, we work online, and we even have home doctor visits online. As such, the place to fight for equity and injustice is online given the digital gap between those in rural and urban areas. Technology even allows us to worship together while at home. In many ways, our physical and spiritual health is tied to our ability to stay connected. We have to ensure that we have a secure connection, so we buy the latest device, get more firewalls, and do what we can to ensure that we don't lose our connection. This is part of our 21st century physical reality, yet, Jesus speaks in a 1st century context about an even more vital connection. It is in God that we live and move and have our being. We have to stay rooted and connected to that which gives us life. That day in the scripture is the focus for today. The crowd gathered around Jesus as he spoke of the word of God. It is a life-giving and truth telling word, a liberating word, and a transforming word that is powerful and precarious, vital and vulnerable, and as such, we must guard it with jealous care. Faith is fragile because life is difficult, and the devil is determined. This Lenten season is a time for us to disconnect from technology and become more connected to the source of life.

Guard your connection, lest the word be lost:

1. *In Transmission*: We live in a technological world full of distractions. While in church, you may receive text messages and direct messages. While in the church house, you may receive invitations to Clubhouse. There are messages and gossip and other things they may work to uproot the word before it's even planted in your heart. This is why we must seek God first and early in the morning, lest the word of God get lost in transmission.

2. Through Trouble: Like the seed on the rocky path, we see many people who come to God with a lot of zeal, but the soil ain't deep. As a result, they fall fast. It's not just about the excitement or dance or how high you jump on Sunday morning but about how you live your life and what your foundation is built on. Trouble will come and some have a lot of zeal for God but aren't mature in faith. Giving your life over to God doesn't mean you won't have trouble, but it does mean God will be there with you through it all.

3. To Temptation: Like the word of God among the thorns, many things vie for our attention. As powerful as the word of God is, if we're not careful, the cares of the world and lure of wealth and desire for things will tempt us. Sometimes we're so busy chasing things that we can't receive that which God has provided. It's not about what you have but who has you. We must be careful lest the lure of wealth, pride, ego, attention, likes on social media choke out of us that which is vital and essential.

Still, there is power in the word of God as the seed sown in good soil will grow and flourish. We can say, God, help me to keep my connection because if I lose my connection to that which is powerful and vital, if I become disconnected from the source, the soil of abundant life, the ground of being, the one in whom my soul takes delight, if I drive through a spiritual dead spot and the calls with the divine get dropped the question is what in the world can I do to restore the connection that I lost? What do I do if I lose my connection?

We can consider the analogy of Pastor Warnock's iPad. One day, it stopped connecting to the internet. While it looked good on the outside, it was broken on the inside. They noted that it may be a problem with the SIM card, the antenna, or the software, and it could also be a result of some external trauma that damaged the internal operating system. Living life, maybe something or someone dropped you or damaged you in external drama and your internal operating system isn't functioning the way it should be. The iPad had to be replaced. Similarly, God says every now and then I have to take from you that which you think is absolutely vital and give you new equipment. Furthermore, Pastor Warnock didn't lose his data because it was backed up in the cloud. Similarly, we have a guarantee in the spiritual cloud. God is orchestrating things on our behalf in the heavenly realm. Lastly, Pastor Warnock didn't have to pay for a new iPad because it had a manufacturer's warranty. Similarly, the one who provided our connection is going to give us a new connection, and it won't cost us a dime. Jesus has already paid it all, and we can have an eternal connection with God our creator.

Reflection Questions

1. What are some of the ways you've used technology during this pandemic? What kind of connectivity issues have you experienced?
2. What has your spiritual connection been like during this pandemic? Have you needed a new connection?

3. What are some of the things working to hinder your connectivity with God during this season?
4. What are some steps we can take to guard our connection with God amid all that's going on?
5. Have you ever been in a "spiritual dead spot" in which you felt like your calls to the divine were dropped? What happened?
6. What can we do to make sure our spiritual connection is backed up here on earth so that it is available for us when we run into trouble?