

How's your hearing? Mark 4:1-20

Our Context, their context.

It has been good over the last six weeks to have heard the gospel, the good news John wrote, preached clearly, to have heard, for the first time or again, how good Jesus is,

That Jesus is the one in whom we can find grace and truth, from whom we can receive the new birth of the Spirit, the life that wells up in us to eternal life

That the Lord Jesus gives us sure hope in death, brings light in our darkness, is the one who forgives our sins, and who through His death and rising guarantees for those who believe in him the day when God Himself will wipe every tear from our eye.

It has been good, encouraging, to hear the gospel.

The people, the very large crowd [4:1], to whom Jesus spoke the parable of the Sower, or the parable of the four soils, were like us in this regard. They were also people hearing the gospel, the gospel not about Jesus but preached by Jesus Himself.

Mark, whose book, whose gospel we heard read this morning, lets us know that from the beginning Jesus' ministry was a gospel, a good news, preaching ministry.

At the beginning of his book Mark writes in 1:14-15

Mark 1: ¹⁴After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee, proclaiming the good news [the gospel] of God: ¹⁵“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news [the gospel]!”

And Mark makes it clear in chapter 1 that this preaching of the gospel was Jesus' priority.

Having spent the evening before healing the sick and casting out demons it says Jesus

Mark 1: ³⁵Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying. ³⁶Simon and his companions searched for him, ³⁷and when they found him they said, “Everyone is looking for you.”

³⁸And he said to them, “Let's go on to the neighboring villages so that I may preach there too. This is why I have come.”

³⁹He went into all of Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

People were keen for him to stay and continue that healing amongst them, but Jesus is determined to move on – so that he can preach, preach the gospel

Jesus is preaching the gospel throughout Galilee

And it's a good message

Like the message we had heard

That said you could enter into God's kingdom when you repent, that is turn back from rebellion against God to put your trust in God's king Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

And that is good news, for to live in God's Kingdom, to live under the reign of God's King, was to live in a reign of justice and peace, to be secure and without want, to know a time when death itself would be ended

And beginning with his preaching, reading on in these early chapters of Mark you see Jesus creating quite a stir amongst the people – by that preaching, accompanied by healings and casting out demons

A lot of people were beginning to follow him

And those people, like this crowd gathered on the shore of the Sea of Galilee – were now in a situation very similar to ours

Hearing the gospel of Jesus – just as we have been hearing the gospel of Jesus

Being offered forgiveness and a place in His Kingdom if they would repent and belief, just as we have heard Jesus, through John’s witness in the gospel, offering us eternal life, that is forgiveness and a place in His eternal Kingdom, if we will believe the gospel [John 20:31]

But in Mark 4 Jesus pauses to tell the people a series of parables

Mark 4: Again he began to teach by the sea, and a very large crowd gathered around him. So he got into a boat on the sea and sat down, while the whole crowd was by the sea on the shore. ² He taught them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them,

At this point in his ministry Jesus tells these parables to engage people with how they are listening to Him, and to help them understand the nature and value of the Kingdom He is proclaiming, to test and correct their own expectations of the kingdom against what Jesus is teaching

And as people who are in the same situation, people who have heard the gospel of Jesus – we are going to pause and listen to Jesus telling these parables in Mark 4 and Matthew 13 for today and the next five weeks – for the same purpose

To help us reflect on how we are listening to Jesus in His gospel word, whether that is the word we have heard just for the last six weeks, or for years

And to help us test and correct our own expectations of Jesus’ reign and its value against what Jesus is teaching.

A classic parable 4:3-9

Jesus, it says, was teaching the crowd ‘many things in parables.’

A parable is at its most basic is a way of speaking that seeks to illustrate and persuade by using a verbal picture, often by telling a story, but sometimes just by a simple comparison. And because usually the picture or comparison doesn’t come with an explanation it is a way of teaching that the hearer has to put effort into understanding, and so it is an invitation to really think about and reflect on what you have heard, to pause and say “what is he getting at.”

And the story of the sower is the classic example of a parable

Mark 4: ² He taught them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them, ³ “Listen! Consider the sower who went out to sow. ⁴ As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground where it didn’t have much soil, and it grew up quickly, since the soil wasn’t deep. ⁶ When the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it didn’t produce fruit. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good ground and it grew up, producing fruit that increased thirty, sixty, and a hundred times.” ⁹ Then he said, “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen.”

It is classic because it is a very ordinary story.

It may sound a bit foreign to us because we do agriculture differently – tractors and cultivators and seed drills and herbicides

But this story Jesus told was something Jesus' first hearers witnessed every year.

Every year from late Autumn to early winter, during the rainy season, they would see farmers, with the bag of seed slung around their neck in front of them, throwing out the seed over their field, a bit like the way some of us spread fertiliser over our lawns.

Normally they would plough after the seed had been broadcast through the field, turning it into the moist soil by their ploughing.

That field would have a beaten path running alongside it, the path used to access other fields and marking the boundary of the field.

And most fields would have some parts more productive than other parts, because in many places in the Palestine hill country there would be a shelf of limestone under a thin layer of topsoil, and with that kind of agriculture it was impossible to get rid of all the weeds – cultivation was your only option, there were no herbicides.

No matter how carefully the farmer distributed the seed some would fall on the path where the birds could eat it, for it wouldn't be ploughed in, it would just stay on the surface.

And some would fall in areas of very thin topsoil, and because this would warm up first as winter turned into spring that seed would germinate first – but as spring turned to summer and the rains ceased it would wither for it didn't have root structure that could access moisture deeper in the soil.

And some seed would fall where there were also the seeds of weeds, and would be overwhelmed by weeds that would grow more vigorously and choke the seed of light and nutrients.

Jesus has painted a very familiar picture

Yet at the end of the story there was something that would have intrigued them, might have made them think Jesus was trying to get at something in telling this story – the yield of the good soil.

The commentators say that 'normal yields ranged from sevenfold to tenfold'. But in the story Jesus says each seed that fell on the good soil was exceptionally productive – thirty, sixty, a hundred fold.

In the yield of the seed in the good soil Jesus has added a detail to make them pause

And having told the story he then explicitly challenged his hearers to engage, to think about what he had just said.

⁹Then he said, "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen."

Jesus has told a parable, painted a word picture – and challenged his hearers to engage with it, to reflect on it, to puzzle over it until they have got His meaning.

But it is not straightforward, and so some come to Him and ask him both about his use of parables, v. 10, and also v. 13 about this particular parable.

Jesus tells Parables for a purpose vv. 10-12

Mark 4: ¹⁰When he was alone, those around him with the Twelve asked him about the parables. ¹¹He answered them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to those outside, everything comes in parables ¹²so that

***they may indeed look,
and yet not perceive;
they may indeed listen,
and yet not understand;
otherwise, they might turn back
and be forgiven.”***

Jesus uses parables because they can do two works, and so can discriminate between hearers.

Like the word of God Isaiah was commissioned to preach in Isaiah 6 parables mediate the judgement as well as the blessing of God, the blessing of knowing ‘the secret/mystery of the Kingdom of God.

They do this intentionally

What makes the difference between a hearer to whom the parables reveal the secret of the Kingdom of God, and a hearer for whom the parable frustrates their finding the blessing of the Kingdom, of turning back to God?

It is coming to Jesus, looking to Jesus to find in Him and from Him the meaning of the parable

Jesus Commends ‘those around him with the twelve’ – so a wider group than the apostles - for coming to ask Him – because He is the key to understanding what He is teaching in parables, just as He is the key to understanding His preaching of the Kingdom of God, how that Kingdom can be near.

The parables are about Him, His ministry and the Kingdom He is bringing, and those with the faith to come to Him [4:34] find themselves taught by the parables about Jesus and His reign.

But the others, those outside,

They hear a story, but only a story.

They might think it entertaining, or they might think it nonsense.

But they never seek from and in Jesus and His ministry its meaning.

It is just a story that does not engage with Jesus and His message, and so don’t respond to Jesus as they should to find life.

Jesus is telling parables for a purpose

To increase the difference between those who hear, believe and understand His preaching, and those who hear, and not believing fail to understand – and so stay under God’s judgement.

That is something to remember as you listen or read Scripture

While you think you are judging the word of Jesus – deciding whether it is worth listening to or not, maybe sitting there and thinking this is too much work, or why can’t He be clearer, that word is judging you

Bringing you blessing as you put in effort, even the effort of asking Jesus for help, to understand it, or leaving you further from finding the forgiveness that leads to life

The Soils – How are we hearing the Word vv. 13-20

While most parables don’t come with an explanation, to help his disciples to get on His wavelength He explains to them the story of the sower and his soils

For this parable, coming first, is the key with its focus on Jesus’ ministry and how people are engaging with His preaching of the kingdom to the other parables

The sower sows the word.

The seed that meets these varying fates is the word, the gospel word, Jesus is preaching, what Matthew calls in his version of the parable the word of the Kingdom Mat. 13:19, and Luke more simply the Word of God Lk. 8:12.

It is a reminder of what we have already seen in Mark, that Jesus' preaching of the gospel is the priority of His ministry – 1:14-15, 1:38-39

And by Jesus' command and appointment it remains the priority in the ongoing ministry of His apostles, whom he sent out to preach, accompanied by a demonstration of Jesus' power over evil

Mark 3: ¹⁴He appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, to send them out to preach, ¹⁵and to have authority to drive out demons.

He called the twelve to preach, and it is Jesus' intention His gospel word be heard throughout the world before the end 13:10.

Mark 13: ¹⁰And it is necessary that the gospel be preached to all nations.

Coming to us with His gospel remains His priority to the end of the age.

Jesus comes to us in His word, so central to how we engage with Jesus will always be how we engage with His word

And that means the parable of the sower is always relevant, holding a mirror to our lives, our hearing, a story inviting us to reflect on how we are responding to Jesus by responding to His word.

And it is the same word sown on every soil, focusing the difference in outcomes on its reception by the hearers

Mark 4: ¹³Then he said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand all of the parables? ¹⁴The sower sows the word. ¹⁵Some are like the word sown on the path. When they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word sown in them. ¹⁶And others are like seed sown on rocky ground. When they hear the word, immediately they receive it with joy. ¹⁷But they have no root; they are short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of the word, they immediately fall away. ¹⁸Others are like seed sown among thorns; these are the ones who hear the word, ¹⁹but the worries of this age, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²⁰And those like seed sown on good ground hear the word, welcome it, and produce fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundred times what was sown."

So let's now accept Jesus' invitation and work through the different soils, and as we do reflect on the kind of hearer each one of us is proving to be, on the response we are making to Jesus' word, the word we have heard over the last six weeks or over many years – by looking at how Jesus says people respond to His word – and comparing our response with theirs

And at the outset recognise that while each of the soils is a type of listener, only in one type of listener does the word bear fruit, fulfill its good purpose. In all but the good soil the seed is wasted, bears no fruit.

¹⁴The sower sows the word. ¹⁵Some are like the word sown on the path. When they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word sown in them.

Luke 8: ¹²The seed along the path are those who have heard and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

You can be sitting here, but the sown word doesn't even register. No sooner spoken, than its forgotten, gone.

It's as if you were never here.

That can happen in a number of ways

You can be determined not to hear, have already dismissed the word Jesus speaks from having a place in your life.

That can be especially the case if you feel yourself made to come by a parent or a spouse, and you are already resenting their pressure, or desire, that you hear

Sad, if anger or resentment against another person stopped you from engaging with the life giving word of God

That is just self inflicted harm

Or you can arrive too tired to pay attention – for all sorts of reasons, some in your control – how late you stayed up playing games or watching Netflix or reading

Or how much you have tried to fit into your morning before you got here

Some out of your control – like children’s sickness or poor sleep

But for whatever reason you fail to engage

But there can be a danger in that – start arriving not expecting to engage – here to see your friends, or it is part of the family routine

Cease to prepare to engage

And the danger is that what might be a challenge at a certain stage of life – arriving to engage with God’s word – becomes a habit for you, and you never come expecting to hear God speak, prepared to put effort into hearing with understanding

You can try and shift the blame to the preacher – and I suspect that is easy enough – but this parable puts the responsibility on the hearer

And I don’t think on the last day standing before God and saying – ‘I know he was telling me the truth about Jesus but it was so boring I just switched off’ will cut it, especially when you think God sent His Son into the world to die to bring this gospel to you.

Yes, the preacher will give account

But you are responsible for how you listen, and to miss out on eternity because there are not enough anecdotes to engage you with the word of God – that would be tragic.

Or the word can fail to register because you come thinking you know it all, have heard it all, already.

But the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword – where it is taught truly it is always at work, even if it is to bring judgement on those who won’t listen

And as I always find I can learn something when the bible is opened, I would be surprised if you could not.

It is sad to be this soil, the hearer who lets the word just be snatched away, for as Luke reminds us it is by believing the gospel word that we are saved, it is responding to the gospel that we find forgiveness and eternal life.

And you might be thinking paying no attention is an expression of your freedom, autonomy, your right to decide for yourself what you will listen to

To shape for yourself the life you want

But Jesus says it is the work of Satan, of the devil, to snatch that word away and rob you of eternal life

You are co-operating with the devil's work to keep you enslaved to death and lies forever.

Don't be this soil

Come prepared to engage with what you hear from God's word

Reflect on what you hear, week by week.

Keep reflecting on what you have heard over the last six weeks. Jesus is offering life to all who believe in Him, and He has risen from the dead with authority to keep His promises

Jesus gives His word for a purpose in your life

IF it isn't immediately obvious to you what it means – read it over, or come and ask

And if you are struggling to engage – what changes can you make so you can pay attention

Don't let non-engagement become an expectation and a habit.

¹⁶ And others are like seed sown on rocky ground. When they hear the word, immediately they receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But they have no root; they are short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of the word, they immediately fall away.

Luke 8: ¹³ And the seed on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy. Having no root, these believe for a while and fall away in a time of testing.

This second group of hearers appear so promising with a quick and enthusiastic response.

But with the passing of time they are exposed to distress, persecution, a time of testing, and they fall away

Those times will come.

Being a believer doesn't take you out of this world, free you from its distress

We are still in an age Jesus said would be characterised wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes and famines, Mark 13:7-8

And we are still in mortal bodies, bodies which will know sickness – not just our own, but of our spouses and children and parents

Still in world of economic instability and greed and unemployment

And all those things can test your faith in God's promises

And being a believer can also expose you to the hostility of the world, to persecution because of the word

Whether that is being the odd one out at work or whatever day at work

Or resisting cutting corners or dishonesty

Or being excluded from your friendship group or family because they don't approve of you being a believer in Jesus

Or being ridiculed or reckoned anti freedom because you believe there is a Creator and a judgment

Times of testing will come

And the Problem at those times for this seed is that they have no root in themselves

Have no way of drawing life sustaining nourishment, haven't cultivated a deepening understanding of the faith or relationship with their Saviour.

Some people seem to start off so well

There at every meeting, volunteering to help with all sorts of jobs

But then

Some tough times come or some hard decisions have to be made and you don't see them any more

Whether it was because they were just carried along in the group, and enjoyed the affirmation that came from others, without developing a faith of their own

Or they had listened selectively to what was being taught, had filtered out the bits where Jesus spoke of the cost of following him, of losing your life to find life

Or they couldn't bear the disapproval of those close to them

But they don't persevere

How can we avoid being this kind of soil

Developing realistic expectations about our lives in this age is a start, realistic expectations that come from because listening to all the word

Including Jesus saying that to follow Him we have to take up our cross, deny ourselves daily, and follow Him, walk in the same path of trusting obedience to God that took Him to the cross, be willing to lose our lives for the sake of trusting and following the Lord Jesus

That we shouldn't be surprised if the world hates us, because it hated him

That the people who object to and oppose our following Jesus may be those of our own household, those closest to us

But developing life sustaining depth to our faith needs more than that

It needs a focus and a constant remembering of gospel realities, ones we are prone to forget

That we are sinners and deservedly condemned – reckoning with what our sin justly deserves, and the reality of judgement

And then thinking about the cross, that you could be loved like that, and only that death saves you – that there is no one else who can bring you the forgiveness you need to be spared in that judgement

And seeing the world through the cross – that this world is one that, for all its attractions, could demand the death of its Creator, who was good and kind and truthful, a world which is bound to pass away

And remembering that Jesus has risen with all authority, and every knee will bow to Him, who has gone before us to take us to be with Him in the heavenly city, and that to deny Him is to be denied before the Father

To have root in yourself – is to keep your eyes on Jesus

And that will be helped by taking responsibility for your own faith, for nurturing it by daily reading and prayer, by a habit of thanksgiving

So that it grows as your knowledge of your Saviour and His faithfulness, love and might grows

Covid was a bit of a wake up call for us, when many of the external supports of our faith – the routine of going to church, the encouragement of meeting with others through the week, the reassuring nature of our routine, were knocked away

How did you go giving thanks then? Rejoicing then? Trusting that your heavenly Father will work all things for your good because you are assured of the his love by Jesus' death for you?

Other trials will come

Cultivate a real, personal faith in the Lord Jesus by having your thinking about your life and this world shaped by the gospel

¹⁸Others are like seed sown among thorns; these are the ones who hear the word, ¹⁹but the worries of this age, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things [pleasures of life Lk. 8] enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

This is the soil that troubles me for I have seen many who seemed to started well – but haven't gone on

Maybe they are still in church

Still have an appearance of being believers – a formal commitment

But as time goes by there is no fruit seen in a changed life, in service, in generosity, in sharing the gospel

And the weeds Jesus speaks of

the worries of this age, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things [pleasures of life Lk. 8] enter in - are very present

Live long enough, and the set backs and new opportunities, the cares and the rewards, can accumulate

For example, when we started together in the church – many no money, no children, just entering into jobs

Now – many of you have children, mortgages, and opportunities for more responsible and better paid work

And the holidays, and the investments

And the competition for time

None of those things are bad in themselves, but their effect can be cumulative

And this choking is gradual

May be imperceptible to the person concerned, or the couple

All the more reason to be alert

So let's think about what chokes the word

First Jesus mentions the worries, the cares, of this age

These will come – with sickness, with children, with aging parents

The Gospel doesn't promise us a life free from cares

It is what we do with them that matters.

We can let them preoccupy us, even feed them

Stay on the net, let the algorithm guide you through all the grim news and the conspiracies, find things that make you more and more anxious

Or we can do what Scripture says

Learn to Trust the big God, for whom nothing is too hard, who controls the sun and wind, before whom the nations are just dust on the scales, who exalts and humbles

And cast our cares on Him as we look forward to the day when the Son appears and all things are made new

And while we wait practice that thankfulness Scripture commands – thankfulness that we have an all sufficient Saviour, that we are adopted as God’s children, that nothing will separate us from His love, a Father who knows us and our needs

Secondly Jesus speaks of the deceitfulness of wealth

Have you ever thought, looking at house prices, that if you were rich so many of your problems would be solved, been tempted to buy that lottery ticket

Wealth makes promises to us – that it will make our lives good, make us secure, give us influence

And we can be tempted to pursue it, even though scripture says those who desire to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare, into many foolish and harmful desires which plunge people into ruin and destruction 1 Tim. 6:9

And in pursuing it neglect our God, and our families, and love of our brothers and sisters – have no time to serve,

And then when we get it – put our trust in it and become complacent about storing up treasure in heaven, or be imprisoned in anxiety about losing it and harden our heart to the needy.

Trusting and pursuing wealth chokes the word, makes us unfruitful in following Jesus

Which is tragic, for Wealth won’t protect you from death or raise you from the dead, it won’t cover over your sins in the judgement

You will either be secure in trusting the almighty God who has promised to provide all we need where we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and who can use even the wicked decisions of wicked people to work His good will for His people, or you will never be secure

Thirdly, there is the desire for other things, what Luke calls the pleasures of this life

Life has a lot to offer many of us in the wealthy west

Travel, engaging pastimes, bigger houses, better neighbourhoods

Many of us have not given ourselves those things, but time passes

And there can be times in our life when we can feel we are missing out, especially where commitment to Jesus puts demands on us

You get into your forties and fifties, and the kids have grown a bit, and you feel your life is ticking away, and there is so much you haven’t done, and you want more

And the things that get in the way of pursuing them

Time spent in serving others, in investing in brothers and sisters who are not like you, don't share your interests, what someone has called the long obedience in the one direction where you keep on with the commitments you made as a follower of Jesus when you were younger

Commitments to children's ministry, to meeting with others in a small group, to investing in mission or supporting evangelism on campus, to loving Jesus' people just because they are Jesus' people

You draw back from them to pursue the more you desire – and fruitfulness as a follower of Jesus is lost
the worries of this age, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things

if not consciously resisted – will have an effect

Leave you weedy, weak, unfruitful

Not knowing growth in hope or love

Without life sustaining joy and thankfulness

Without zeal for the reputation of your Saviour, or the salvation of the lost

Recognise that – and resist them, and that resistance starts in your heart

That is where you nurse your anxieties, or not

Listen to the lies of money, or not

Entertain desire for other things, or not

It is in your heart that you will trust God's promises, heed His warnings, set your will to pursue what glorifies Him, and that will be seen in your choices, and how you use your time

Time is a good test – do you have time, would you make time, to read the bible with someone, teach Sunday School, be a kind neighbour, devote yourself to prayer?

God's word says that

2 Cor. 5:⁹ Therefore, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

There is never a time in life when it is not the right time to make it our aim to please Him

So look at what you are giving your heart to

How you are using your time?

And if you find the weeds have grown up around you, stealthily, gradually

Repent by putting doing what Jesus says first

Start by asking how you can love your wife or husband, your brothers and sisters

But then there is the surprisingly fruitful good soil

²⁰ And those like seed sown on good ground hear the word, welcome it, and produce fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundred times what was sown."

Luke 8:15 But the seed in the good ground—these are the ones who, having heard the word with an honest and good heart, hold on to it and by enduring, produce fruit.

These are people who hear and welcome the word of Jesus

Who understand it [Matt. 13:27], which might involve them, as the disciples do here, asking questions, putting in effort to understand

Hold it fast and ‘by enduring produce fruit.’

They endure, through opposition and trials and cares [Romans 5:3-5]

They endure, turning away from the enticements of wealth and pleasure

They keep trusting Jesus and doing what He says

What does seed sown on good soil look like?

It actually looks like many of you, and I am thankful for the encouragement of that

One of the blessings of staying put in a congregation where God’s word is preached and taught – from the front, and in growth groups and Sunday School and youth group– is seeing the word bear fruit in your brothers and sisters

In changed lives, changed character – people becoming more patient, gentle, humbling themselves

In engagement with the responsibilities of home and work, marriage and children, as believers – seen many knuckle down to love and respect

In determination in keeping on encouraging each other, intentionally sustaining relationships in which that happens

In faithfulness in trial – and many of you have been tested, sometimes severely

And yes, in longing for others to be saved and keeping on speaking about Jesus to others

To see that, the word bearing fruit in the lives of our brothers and sisters over time, is a great encouragement, and I hope you will remember that if changes in the coming year unsettle you – there is great encouragement in staying put

To you, who are hearing and heeding the word – keep listening to the word Jesus preaches through His apostles

Listen to this word that tells you of the dangers of stopping listening

It is time that reveals the difference in the soils, in the hearers, reveals what kind of soil we are

And we are not at the end yet

Now is still the time to keep on listening, believing, and obeying the gospel word

Not enough to start well

Not enough to have an appearance of life without fruitfulness

The word, received with honest and good hearts will bear fruit for eternity where you endure in trusting and obeying the one who speaks it, who comes to us in His word, our Lord Jesus

Brothers and sisters, take the time today to ask yourself – what kind of hearer am I,

Not what kind of hearer have I been, but what kind of hearer am I now
 what kind of hearer am I proving to be in my engagement with God's word today
 And if you see in yourself anything other than that good and honest heart, repent
 And seek forgiveness, and ask our merciful saviour for a renewed faith and zeal
 For there is only one kind of soil that bears fruit for eternity
 All the rest are lost

But we are not only hearers
 Every disciple has a share in making disciples
 And there is encouragement here to keep sowing the word

The encouragement to keep sowing

Note Jesus' confidence in His word. Even though He knew He would be rejected, finish His life alone, he did not doubt His word would be fruitful, that it would find good soil among those who listened.

He wasn't put off by the existence of stony soil, or weedy soil

We should not doubt that the gospel word will be fruitful, or be put off by the hard soil or weeds, by talk of societal changes making things harder, or unsettled by the consciousness of resistance by some to the word, or disappointed by the variable response the word brings

Jesus is confident His word will find good soil, and we should be too

But for a harvest we must sow, we have to get the word out there.

And that is all of us, in our daily conversations as well as in our intentional opportunities like the Meet Jesus mission

Throwing it out to all and sundry

God has His good soil, so share the word that is bearing fruit for eternity in your own life as you receive it with persevering faith.