

Interactive lesson



picture from MMMS collection

Which would you prefer:

A cup of coffee now or a fresh pot of coffee tomorrow?

Ten dollars now or a hundred dollars in a year?

An apple now or a loaded apple tree in your backyard in six years?

A month's vacation at the location of your choice or a new car/truck of your choosing?

Great fame and riches with a short life, or anonymity and low income with a long life?

Which are the "right" answers?

Many choices are not necessarily "right" or "wrong," but they all have consequences. Can you tell me of a time when you supported someone else's decision, even though you would have chosen differently?

Why did you support their choice?

Have you ever been trapped in a choice between two bad things? If so, what did you do? What were the consequences?

Could someone have helped you then? How?

We all have the opportunity to make decisions. Sometimes we choose wisely, other times less so.

Often our choices are reflections of who we are and where we are in life. Should others judge us for our choices, or should we judge others for theirs?

Only God knows all of the reasons behind decisions; only God can truly judge. Let us pray to God for wisdom in making our decisions and strive to treat others with the loving kindness of God as we all deal with the results of our choices.

Gospel lesson

After last week's reading where Jesus invited us to take on His yoke, Jesus got into conflict with Pharisees. His mother and brothers came to speak with Him during His tirade against the false-hearted, but He pointed to His disciples - those who do the will of God - as his true family. This brings us to:



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/parable-sower-seed/>

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

NRSV

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.

²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach.

³And he told them many things in parables, saying:

"Listen! A sower went out to sow.

⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up.

⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil.

⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away.

⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

⁹ Let anyone with ears listen!"

¹⁸ "Hear then the parable of the sower.

¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path.

²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;

²¹ yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away.

²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing.

²³ But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "O Blessed Spring"

TFWS #2076>

Message: Seeds in the Dirt



picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/the-path-of-the-disciple-imagining-a-new-reality/seventh-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/seventh-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Sower of the Spirit within us,
as we take time now to further consider today's
scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That our faith may take deep root, that we may
produce plentiful seeds for You. Amen.

“The theme for this part of the “Path of the Disciple” series invites us to look at potential. We are asked to imagine fruitfulness and then to work for that in the whole ministry of the church.”

When thinking about looking at potential, I am reminded of the old story about twins on their birthday. One was the ultimate optimist and the other the ultimate pessimist. Their parents wanted to make their outlooks on life less extreme, so they prepared gifts to challenge those mindsets.



pictures from
<https://www.amazon.com/Liberty-Imports-Remote-Control-Truck/dp/B0BBKDV5X8/> and https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pile_of_manure_on_a_field.jpg

For the pessimist who love firetrucks, they got a deluxe toy firetruck with lights and sirens. When he opened his gift, his face momentarily flashed with delight, and then he began to cry. When asked why, he told his parents that if he played with it that someday it would be broken and not work anymore, and so he would not play with it and was sad.

Unable to convince that son otherwise, the parents turned to their optimist and presented him with his gift: a large pile of manure. His face momentarily crumpled with confusion, then his eyes widened, he grabbed a shovel, and began digging gleefully in it. His parents asked him what he was doing, and he

replied: “With all this manure, there has to be a pony in here somewhere!”

In both cases, the boys did not look at what was before them for what it was, but looked at the potential of what could be.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/yo-jacob-esau/>

Jacob and Esau were twins who were opposites too. They struggled against each other from before they were born. People in this world struggle against each other today, arguably from before they were born with [systemic biases in place that put up barriers to people] based on race, gender, or other attributes.

Paul talked about how sin is identified by the law and leads to death. Society exists because people form relationships and work together. When people take one another to court for justice under the law, and ill will remains regardless of the verdict. Their relationship is not really healed.

Instead of flourishing life as members of society, they are lessened; enough of that, and they die. Thus the law which identifies wrongdoing leads to death. Jesus teaches a better way: love for God and for one another. Love heals relationships and enables life.

The story in Genesis says that “Esau despised his birthright.” To me, it is clear that the story was recorded by Jacob’s family, for both twins were loved and blessed, both despised a blessing they took for granted, and both got what they thought they wanted.

Esau despised his birthright; Jacob despised his brother. If Jacob loved his brother as God intends for us to love one another, Jacob would not have forced Esau to make a choice between eating and his heritage. Instead, he would have nurtured his brother, feeding him without the costly demand, that the heritage could one day be shared in love.

But people do not understand the possibilities, or they reject God’s teaching, or forget, or are distracted from living the Good News. Jesus spoke about this in the parable of the sown seeds.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/parable-sower-seed/>

In interpreting this parable, folks have looked at it in a variety of ways:

- † As Christians, we are the seeds being scattered, and we need to produce other Christians, the more the better.

- † We are the soil in which the seeds of God's love land, nurturing or choking or ignoring or starving those seeds that need to grow.
- † We are sowers of seed, responsible for preparing the soil and using care in where we scatter them.

Which is right? Well, all of them are legitimate interpretations of God's Word, with different points to be made depending on what your situation is and how God is speaking to you. Regardless of which focus you use, Jesus enables us to connect with God and with one another, and the Holy Spirit works through the love we show as we live.

As sowers of seed, think of what things you might say and do to share God's love and nurture the kingdom of God in others on this earth. As soil, consider the environment in which you live and how you might prepare it better for the grace of God to flourish in, around, and through you. As a seed, how should you be growing in faith and sharing God's love more?



picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/the-path-of-the-disciple-imagining-a-new-reality/seventh-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/seventh-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

As you dwell on those things, pray to God for wisdom and guidance, that rather than being trapped in the death cycle of forced adherence to the law, we all

can be freed to new life with restored relationships and developing possibilities we never knew could be.