

Mark 4:11-12

*And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN."*

The fourth chapter of Mark is often referred to as "the parables by the sea" section of the Gospel of Mark. The key to all the parables of Jesus is the phrase "to hear" which appears 13 times in this chapter alone. The command "to hear" is the heart of the great confession of faith for the Jews, the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4: "*Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!*" The issue of hearing is the heart of parables and is the key to bearing fruit, the essential mark of the Kingdom of God.

As a pastor, I have to admit: sometimes people respond to the proclamation of the word as airline passengers responding to flight attendants' instructions before takeoff on what to do in case of an emergency. Before every flight, they invite the passengers to watch and follow along with the card in the seat pocket in front of them. But more often than not, passengers ignore the instructions while being preoccupied with looking out the windows, reading a magazine or even sleeping. No airline will allow the flight attendant to skip the instructions just because no one appears to be listening because the instructions are a matter of life and death.

The power to bring fruit to a plant is not in the hand of the sower. While it is easy for all who sow seeds in the soils of friends, family and co-workers to despair over apparent failure or vicious opposition, the power to bring fruit is in the hands of God alone, no matter which soil we scattered His seed in. If some seed falls on hearts of stone, that is God's business, not ours. We will never know if the heart does not have ears to hear unless we speak to them. Whether or not it is received does not affect its power to transform lives. Truth is truth, regardless if it is popular in the polls or pursued by the masses.

There is still an important truth for those who believe they are the good soil and have received the seed. For many, the words of Jesus go in one ear and out the other. We can all agree the first soil was bad and the fourth soil was good. But the seed received in the second and third soil never produced fruit. Like the fig tree of Mark 11, churches are filled with people who have leaves, branches and external signs of life. But the fig tree with no fruit is cursed by Jesus. Bearing fruit is the expectation of the Lord. Do not let the Word of the Lord be something your spouse or child fails to hear. The admonition of our passage is for you this morning: "*They hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.*"