

Series: A Life That Really Matters Sermon: "The Good Soil" February 5, 2012
Trinity United Methodist Church— I Timothy 3:10-16 Hebrews 4:12-13

One of the abundant natural resources that we have been blessed with in North America is our rich soil. When we think of natural resources we often think of natural gas, coal or maybe even water.

But it's from the common soil beneath our feet from which we raise enough food to feed every man, woman and child in this country with enough left over to send food to many other nations. Often we take this common gift for granted.

No where is our rich farm land more evident than in southwest Indiana. We don't have many rocks in our soil like some of our southern neighbors. There are sections in Daviess and Knox Counties where you can look for miles over rich fields of harvest. There is more tillable land in Knox County than in any other county in the state.

Farmers in the area value good soil. So much so that they become very creative in its use. They rotate their crops these days to preserve the soil----- corn one year then soy beans the next. Also I stand amazed on how farmers continue to farm the river bottoms just north of here.

Every spring the White and Patoka Rivers overflow their banks, sometimes more than once, disrupting spring planting. Yet the farmers go back and plant again and again. Why? Because they know that this is the richest soil. With each flood minerals are washed out into the fields bringing soil with nutrients which in the end produce large yields.

Farmers know that abundant grain and vegetables come from the good soil, so good soil is of much value to farmers.

The Good Soil is the title of my sermon for today. Drawing a parallel between the soil of the earth and our lives as Christians was not something I came up with on my own. Jesus often used soil as a topic for teaching about being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

If our lives are going to bear fruit, if our lives are going to be productive we too need to sink our roots into the good soil. According to Jesus, this is a fact of life.

It was Paul in Galatians 5 who listed the kinds of fruit that can be produced in a Christian if they have sunk their roots into the good soil. Some of these fruits that he mentioned were peace, patience, kindness, goodness and joy.

When it comes to sinking our roots into soil there are lots of options out there. We can sink our roots into our culture. We can sink our roots into our possessions. We can sink our roots into our financial success. We can sink our roots into personal popularity. We can sink our roots into our talents and abilities. There is some good in some of these things but are they the most nutritious ----- the richest soil----- are they the best soil to sink our roots into? Will our roots really hold in those soils ----- will they produce the best possible fruit in our lives?

In our II Timothy 3 passage Paul is setting himself up as an example of what can happen as a result of Christian discipleship. He talks about the persecutions that came his way at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra. So now from this extreme example of living the Christian life, and what can happen as a result of it, he carefully points his listeners toward something that would keep them strong regardless of the circumstances and will help them to bear fruit even in the worst of weather.

What does he say? Where does he direct his readers?

In verse 14 he says, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you
....."

Yes he refers to the sacred writings. And about the sacred writings he says in verse 16, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness that the person of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

Many of us, as Paul says, have learned from our childhood. That is one of the reasons we are here today and still coming. Someone early on taught us the

scriptures and introduced us to God and shared with us that both could be trusted both for our salvation and for living out our personal lives each day.

So Jesus and Paul both suggest that the scriptures are good soil into which we need to sink the roots of our lives if we want our lives to be fruitful and fulfilling.

The scriptures that we embrace are interesting. The scriptures, the Bible, was composed by about 40 people of several countries who had a variety of occupations. They wrote over a period of about 1,500 years and in three languages -----Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Yet the Bible has one great theme --- ----- the redemption of mankind by a loving God who sought out men and women.

The unity and the common purpose of these writings can be explained only by assuming, as the book itself claims, that the Bible had one supreme author ----- the Holy Spirit of God. That's what our passage for today means in II Timothy 3:16 when it says, "All scripture is inspired by God" ----- "God breathed" in the NIV version.

Then our second scripture also bring credibility to the scriptures. It's an unusual passage and it goes like this: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart"

Let's focus on that line, "the Word of God is living and active".

The Jews had a very special idea about words. To the Jews once a word was spoken it took on life by itself. For them there was great value in words. So a word was not only a sound with a certain meaning but to them a word has power ----- a force which went forth and did things.

In the early days of our country a battle took place at a fort in south Texas. It was called the Alamo. The Alamo was a terrible defeat but the cry "Remember the Alamo" rallied the troops to defeat the invading Mexican army. Those became living and active words.

A couple weeks ago we celebrated the birth of a great American, Martin Luther King Jr., and in the midst of his battle to find justice for all American people in one of his speeches he coined the phrase, "I Have A Dream". That phrase took life so much so that every school child today is familiar with those words. They took life all by themselves as they connected with people.

If this is true of the words and phrases of mortal men, think how much more this is true of the Word of God. Other things may acquire an academic interest but the Bible has become a living word for millions of people who hang their life on these amazing words.

Take your own life ----- perhaps there are words of scripture that have carried you through the storms of life. When people take God seriously they soon realize that the Bible is not only something to be studied; it is not only something to be read; it is not only something to be written about; it is something to be acted upon and something to respond to.

I can remember being in a classroom in college when a student asked one of my professors how he knew that the Bible was inspired by God. He didn't try to mount a great rational argument in response to this question in hopes of convincing this student of this idea. But I do remember tears coming to his eyes as he shared from his heart that when he read the Bible something dynamic happened in his life. That personal word was hard to refute. These words of scripture had come alive for him.

Oftentimes taking the Bible to heart causes Christians to move to their neighbor with a Word from God ----- a word of help, a word of light, a word of hope, a word of encouragement. The scriptures are not stagnant ----- they are living and active.

The second point from this Hebrew passage is that the Word of God is sharper than any two edged sword; it pierces even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow.

What we have here is not a pretty picture. We have here a sword cutting through the flesh into the joints and marrow of the human body. The two edged

sword was particularly good of doing just that. Obviously this picture was taken from the type of battles that the readers of that day were familiar with.

The point that we need to make here is that the words of the Bible are penetrating. They don't just stay on the surface ----- they cut deep into the souls of men and women. They touch us at our deeper level.

In Jeremiah 23:29 the scriptures are compared to a hammer that breaks the rocks to pieces I guess referring to our hearts. But a hammer will not break a stone unless it is applied by the skill and strength of some powerful person. Likewise a sharp sword is useless unless it has some hand to push it and direct it. Might this hand be the hand of God?

From time to time someone will come to the door after a service and they will say to me, "Preacher I felt like you were preaching right to me today." Oftentimes that is without me even knowing their circumstances. Honestly folks I don't just pick out someone different each Sunday and decide to preach to you. I don't read your mail. But the Word of God directed by God can bring home a truth to our hearts as if it were packaged just for us where we are in our personal life. These words are living.

These words of God cutting into the lives of men and women dividing soul and spirit can sometimes be an uncomfortable experience for a believer as we open our lives to God's scrutiny. But allowing God to move in us can have great rewards for the seeker who wants to experience a really close relationship with God.

And then finally our passage tells us that the Word of God discerns the thoughts and intentions of our heart.

It is easy to feel uncomfortable if we know that all the secret places of our thoughts are going to be exposed. In the creation story, once Adam had sinned it says that he attempted to hide from God in the garden.

One of the tendencies of men and women is the impulse to attempt to escape the notice of God. We wish that God didn't have X Ray vision.

To illustrate this let's propose that in one hour the books of our lives would be open for everyone to read. In these books, all that we have ever done or said or thought would be as easy to see as the outer clothing on our body.

In a sense, all the dirty laundry would be exposed. Instantly all our confidence could give way to embarrassment and maybe shame. We're scared because we know how men and women might use that information against us.

But with God it's different. It's pointless to try to keep that information from God since God and His Word discern the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. All of them!

Let's face it. To be completely known and understood and yet accepted is one of the deepest needs of the human soul. Some marriages or friendships get pretty close, but we cannot find it completely among our fellow human beings.

But with God it's different. Be assured that God before whom all lives are open and laid bare, knows us through and through, and yet as we come clean with Him, as we open our lives to Him, He forgives us and accepts us. There is in this relationship health and peace and comfort and joy.

So sink your roots into the Good Soil of God's Word and see what you can learn about yourself and Him.