

July 12, 2026 — Sermon

Scripture Reading: Genesis 25:19–34

Gospel Reading: Matthew 13:1–9

“In the Right Place”

The day after I officially began my ministry here in Wisconsin, I was scheduled to meet Dennis at Parkview at 10 o'clock. Since I live in the parsonage, I often notice when someone comes to the church. Around 9:45, I saw several cars in the parking lot. At first, I wondered, “Is Dennis already here?” So I entered the church and saw some people in the meeting room. But the atmosphere was a little different from what I had expected. They did not seem to know who I was, and it did not look like the kind of church meeting I had expected. After a few minutes, I realized that it was an AA meeting. The group meets at the church twice a week. Yes, I was in the wrong place. I explained that I had come to the wrong place and that I needed to find the right place for my meeting. They laughed warmly and gave me a pamphlet about AA.

Takeaway from this anecdote: being in the right place matters. So today, I want to ask a simple question: Are we in the place where we are supposed to be? That question may sound simple, but it is not always easy. Being in the right physical location does not necessarily mean that we are truly in the right place. Being in a library does not automatically make us wise. Being at home does not automatically make us peaceful. Being in a church building does not automatically make us good soil.

Being in the right place is not only about finding where we belong. It is also about what kind of place we help create. When we come ready to learn, a library becomes a place of wisdom. When family members live with love and care for one another, a house becomes a home. And when we love God and our neighbors, we become a church through which God works.

In our Genesis reading today, Rebekah asks a question about her pregnancy. She feels the children struggling within her, so she inquires of the Lord. The Lord answers her, “Two nations are in your womb.” Two peoples, two futures, and two different paths are in conflict within one body. The stories that follow—the stories of her two sons, Esau and Jacob—show how they grow, move in different directions, and seek the place where they belong. Their story reminds us that finding the place where we are meant to be is not always peaceful or straightforward. Before we find that place, we may first experience confusion, conflict, and struggle.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus tells a parable. A parable is not just a simple story. It is Jesus' way of helping us understand the realities of God's kingdom through the language of everyday life. Jesus did not usually begin with abstract ideas. He spoke about things people knew well: bread, sheep, lamps, coins, seeds, and soil. He used the ordinary things of life to open their eyes—and ours—to the mystery of God.

Today, Jesus tells us about a sower who goes out to sow. Later in the passage, Jesus explains what this parable means. Some seed falls on the path, and the birds come and eat it. Some falls on rocky ground, where there is not much soil. It springs up quickly, but when the sun rises, it is scorched. Some falls among thorns, and the thorns grow up and choke it. But some falls on good soil and brings forth grain—some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Many of you, probably all of you, know far more about farming than I do. You know that seed does not grow simply because it is good seed. The place matters. The soil matters. The depth matters. The roots matter.

This past week, while I was walking with some church members, I learned something new about farming. I learned that there are different seed companies that produce different varieties of seed. I also noticed a Pioneer sign in one of the fields. And I learned that field corn is not usually grown for people to eat directly. Anyway, the seed matters.

In Jesus' parable, the seed represents the word of the kingdom, as Jesus explains in v. 19. The same good seed is scattered everywhere, but it does not produce the same result in every place. So, in this parable, the problem is not with the seed. The parable invites us to think about the soil—about how we receive the word of God. The condition of our hearts affects not only how we receive God's word, but also how we treat the people around us. So the question becomes: How do we cultivate good soil for the word of God?

There is a saying about farming in Korea: A poor farmer blames the seed. A better farmer chooses good seed. But the best farmer tends the soil. This saying emphasizes the importance of the soil over the seed, as well as the skill of a good farmer. Likewise, in Jesus' parable, our attention turns to the soil because every kind of soil receives the same seed.

When there is no fruit, it is easy to blame the seed. It is also easy to blame the sunlight, the temperature, the precipitation, or the wind. But Jesus' parable directs our attention to the condition of the soil. It invites us to examine our hearts and ask whether God's word can take root and bear fruit within us. And our one job is to make it productive.

Many people say that the environment is difficult to change. But sometimes, an environment can be changed by what we do and by what we bring into it. Our one job is to cultivate good soil.

I would like to close my sermon with a short personal note. I grew up in a city, so I had very little experience with rural life. When I came to Wisconsin in May for an introductory meeting, I felt both excited and nervous. Some of you were there that day.

Your warm welcome helped me feel more at ease. Since then, many of you have helped me learn about the churches, the communities, and life here in Wisconsin—even some good local restaurants.

Without your welcome and support, I would probably feel much more nervous standing in this room today. But your kindness has helped make this unfamiliar place feel more like home. That is the difference our attitudes and actions can make.

Fear can change the room. Resentment can change the room. But our kindness can change the room. Our patience can change the room. Our faith can change the room.

We are not only shaped by the soil around us. In some ways, we also help shape that soil. The right place is not simply a place we find. By God's grace, it can also become a place we help create together.

May God place us where we are supposed to be. May God make our hearts good soil. And may God help every one of us become faithful farmers—people who do not simply blame the seed or merely choose good seed, but faithfully tend the soil with love, patience, and faith. Amen.

Let us pray. Loving God, soften what is hard within us and clear away what keeps your word from taking root. Where fear and resentment grow, plant in us kindness, patience, and faith, so that the places we enter may reflect your love. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.