**“Fighting Alone!” 2017 07 16**

**Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23 Pr. H. Adachi**

May the Grace and Peace from our Heavenly Father be poured into people's hearts in this sanctuary!

There was an opportunity for me to talk with a Nippon Shinto’s religious leader. The subject was why people may face predicaments. She shared her religion’s teaching: People get suffering/challenges due to his/her past wrong actions. Not only his or her individual wrong actions, but also his or her ancestor’s wrong actions; people deserve sufferings and challenges.

She and many religious leaders today are still teaching this causality. If you do such and such, you deserve such and such… What is the teaching of Christianity? Is Christianity teaching the same causality? At least in our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we are not teaching this, we often use the phrase, “Justification by Faith through God’s Grace” instead.

Humans are never perfect and are not incapable of doing any wrong doing. Unfortunately, we can act in ways contrary to God’s wishes, which we call sin and that is the reality of human history beginning with Adam and Eve. However, even if we do wrong, our heavenly father is still loving humans and we do not say people’s suffering is heaven’s judgement. We, as Lutherans, are not teaching causality.

Our heavenly father, the creator, who is filled with grace and love, sent merciful Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Only because of our faith we believe the Father -God, the Son - Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, we are freed from our past wrong actions and we are justified by our faith. Accepting graceful Jesus Christ who suffered death on behalf of our sinful lives but was resurrected; we are justified and saved because of this. This is the Good News, the Gospel of Christianity.

Whether or not people realize, all the world’s Christians are commissioned to proclaim the Good News. However, this mission, to proclaim God’s grace, is not an easy thing to do. We’re keenly aware that when Jesus was sent to this world, his teaching was aggressively opposed by religious leaders.

In those circumstances, Jesus was talking about “the parable of the sower” to people who were strongly against Jesus’ graceful actions and teachings. That parable was written verses in 1 through 9. The meaning of the parable was further explained in verses 18 through 23, so I will not preach the meaning of each pattern of seeds today.

Rather, during this message, I recommend each one of us reflect upon the sower in the parable. There was a famous painter, named Millet, who described this sower in his painting. It is said that Millet painted almost the same painting twice and one is in Boston Fine Art Museum. When I was living in Boston over 20 years ago, I became a member of the museum and went to see the sower many times. Sometimes, I sat, in a chair, in front of the painting for 30 or 40 minutes each visit.

Although it is not the real artwork, the same picture is printed on the front of today’s bulletin. Please reflect upon what you heard in the Gospel text and this picture. I have believed Millet painted this painting after reading the Gospel text many times.

Further I believe that he painted this artwork with the strong help of the Holy Spirit. What Jesus advises is not something farmers normally do. They do not scatter seeds on unplowed land. Farmers sow seeds on arable land that is well-plowed and rich in nutrients.

What Jesus is seeming telling the sower to do is scatter seeds on land that has a low probability of yielding healthy sprouts. Who is the sower vigorously sowing seeds, even though the probability is low?

Social circumstances and Jewish leaders were not welcoming Jesus and were against what Jesus was doing when he miraculously healed the sick, made the lame walk, or made the blind see, because people afflicted with illness or disability deserved their difficulties. They were being punished for past wrongdoing.

In the teaching of the punishment causality and Jewish leaders’ understanding of the law, people deserved those challenges in their lives rather than being saved by Jesus. And, also, even the disciples were not hundred percent sure if they understood Jesus’ graceful actions based on God’s unconditional love, since they were not completely following Jesus when he was crucified.

Even though Jesus was not well understood and everyone around him was not truly supporting Jesus, he himself was sowing the seeds of the Gospel, proclaiming the Good News and showing God’s unconditional love to people rather than judging people. When you understand the social context, do you see Jesus in the parable of the sower? Don’t you see Jesus in the Millet painting, “The Sower?”

Even though the probability for the seeds to sprout is very low because the land is not well-plowed and flocks of birds are hoping to eat those seeds, the sower, Jesus is still scattering the seeds of the Good News.

What do you think about today’s world? Not only in the Japanese community, but also even in the United States, the seeds of the church, the body of Jesus, have not sprouted or grown in many cases. I have seen many failures trying to start new Christian communities.

You might disagree with me and say that there are successful new churches. However, when you listen to the teachings of those new big churches, they are often “if you do such and such then you will succeed or you will blessed by God…” Understanding God’s unconditional love even without our effort or actions is not an easy concept and takes time to learn.

Even if it is difficult, like Jesus’ sower parable, let’s continue to be Christians who vigorously scatter the seeds of God’s love, proclaiming the Good News, and showing God’s grace and love. There is always hope that some seeds will sprout and bear fruits thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and hundredfold according to His will. Amen.