That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 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. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!”

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

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.”

Based on Jesus’ math, we live in a world with a 1-out-of-4 success rate. He’s talking about people’s lives here, with 1-out-of-4 people responding to “the word of the kingdom.” That means three out of four don’t? That’s not good! John Claypool was an Episcopal priest, prolific writer and professor of homiletics. He writes about this parable; A new kind of realism seems to be emerging in Jesus. By this time, he appears to be coming to terms with failure, …
Jesus had come home to the fact that about three out of four of the things he would like to see happen would not materialize because of factors beyond his control. (Lectionary Homiletics, John Claypool, “Playing One Hand,” vol. 4, no. 8, July 1993, p. 17.)

Could it be that Jesus is telling us something personal in this parable? This is the resistance he was facing. These were his struggles. These were his obstacles, his experiences. These three soils that produce nothing; three human conditions that are resistant to God, might be the very things that cause Jesus to lose sleep.

He didn’t fix everything. He didn’t heal everybody. He didn’t change the world instantaneously. He ran into these soils. It was more like little seeds being scattered into people’s lives, with the faith that there is a soil where the harvest does come.

Why else would you crawl into a boat and tell this little story to a crowd who came out to hear you speak? Surely, he didn’t get in there just to tell people how bad things are. He didn’t get in there to test soil samples and deliver the bad news that there are overwhelming odds against us. We already know that.

Don’t you think he got into that boat, into our boat, to tell us there is a fourth soil? There is good soil, where God is at work in the world. We need to hear that! We need to know that’s true.

John Sanford, in his book, The Kingdom Within, suggests there are all four soils in every person. There is a part of us that is the hard path, non-receptive. There is a part of us that lives in the rocks. Shallow. And there is a part of us that is covered up by thorns; the cares of the world and the lure of wealth. But there is also a part of us that is good soil! So, is there good soil in every person?

Would that be true for the shooter in the New Zealand killings? Fifty innocent men, women and children slaughtered, and 50 others wounded, as they worshipped in a mosque. Could that person have any good soil in him?

Or what about the young man who sat through a bible study in Charleston, S.C., then pulled out a gun and murdered all those beautiful people, while they were praying? Could there possibly be any good soil in him? If you were his parents, you would hope so. You would believe there is.

I’m just a human father, but if one of my children, or grandchildren, is in distress, then I am in distress. That would be true of any loving parent. If any of my
children’s lives were in those three soils, I’d want to get them out. I’d want more for them. I wouldn’t rest until they moved to the good soil, to a place of receptivity to God.

The Scriptures say we are all children of God. If I want to see the good in my children, how much more does God want to see the good in us…all of us? It is likely that these three soils break the heart of God:

- **people whose hearts are too hard** to receive God’s love and grace,
- **people whose faith is too shallow** to hold up in a life-storm,
- **people too consumed** with the cares of the world and the lure of wealth.

Those are faith-killers! Why would you want to hold onto any of those soils when they produce such a destructive life? Why would God want to leave you there, if you are a child of God?

Jesus got into that boat to remind us that there is a fourth soil. There is a place where God is at work and the kingdom is being cultivated and multiples. There’s more than hard paths, rocks and thorns. There is good soil! **Don’t stop sowing!** Don’t give up on anybody. Not ever! God has never given up on you!

Some of you may remember when I first got here, I was invited to be on The Megan Kelly Show with a friend of mine, Freddie Sherrill. Freddie lived a hard life and made plenty of mistakes. He knew about these three soils. He had a mailbox in there! He had the typical sad story of being raised in poverty, being homeless, addicted, a criminal, and going to prison. But there was more than that. There was good soil in Freddie.

We were invited on the show because I gave him a job and because he took that opportunity, and with God’s help, turned his life around. They had us on the show because Freddie graduated from Queens University at the age of 65!

A long time ago, Freddie gave me this poem.

**Don’t Quit**

*by John Greenleaf Whittier*

> When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,  
> When the road you’re trudging seems all uphill,  
> When funds are low and the debts are high,  
> And you want to smile but you have to sigh,  
> When care is pressing you down a bit,  
> Rest if you must, but don’t you quit.
Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As every one of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about,
When he might have won if he’d stuck it out.
Don’t give up, though the pace seems slow -
You may succeed with another blow.

Success is failure turned inside out -
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are -

It may be near when it seems afar;
So stick to the fight when you’re hardest hit -
It’s when things seem worst that you mustn’t quit.

That feels like what Jesus was saying in that boat. Three out of four soils aren’t going to produce anything. That’s discouraging. But there is this other soil! There is a place where God is at work. Don’t underestimate that. Don’t think for a minute that those three soils control this world.

For all we know, that was precisely what Jesus was thinking as he hung on the cross. There is a fourth soil! And he was right!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Congregation: Amen