

DO THE MATH
Three Kingdom Parables on Sowing –Matthew 13: 18-23 –October 14, 2012
The Church of the Covenant

There are mathematical formulas in scripture, but often we do not “DO THE MATH”. I think sometimes we are like the man, mentioned by the great Presbyterian pulpiteer, Dr. Bruce Thielemann, (The Last Word, A Baccalaureate Sermon preached at Waynesburg University, 1987) who awakens in the morning and takes off his pajamas, invented by the East Indians, takes a shower using soap, first invented by the Gauls, shaves using a razor, first invented by the Sumerians, then goes downstairs to have breakfast, consisting of Canadian bacon, tea from Ceylon, coffee from Colombia, two eggs whose chickens were fed by feed from Mexico, then goes back upstairs to put on his suit, first developed on the Asian steppes, a necktie, first developed by the Croatians as a ceremonial shawl, puts on his hat, developed in East Asia, his umbrella, designed by the Chinese, and picks up his newspaper, the letters on the page first developed as Arabic script, and printed by a process developed by the Germans. He bows his head and prays to a Hebrew God in an Indo-European tongue, and thanks his Maker that he is 100% American! Do the math! It doesn’t always add up.

Jesus tells us a series of parables in the gospel of Matthew that do add up; but only to those who have ears to hear and eyes to see the Kingdom of God right in front of them. Today we focus on what is referred to as “The Parable of the Sower”, Matthew 13: 1-9 and 13-23. “A sower went out to sow...” begins Jesus (Matthew 13: 3). One fourth of the seeds fall upon a path and the birds come and devour it; one fourth of the seeds fall on rocky ground and they immediately spring up but because they have no root they wither away in the heat of the day. One fourth of the seeds spring up among thorns and the thorns grow up and choke them. Ah, but one fourth of the seeds fall on good soil, and these bring forth grain, some hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty. Then Jesus says, “*He who has ears, let him hear.*” (v. 9) There is a mathematical formula here if we have ears to hear it. Do the math. That means that for every four people invited to come to church and to Jesus, one in four actually will do so. The **first fourth** that fall upon the hard path are those who come but do not understand that their eternal souls rely on what happens next. There is no passion, no desperation, so the birds (Jesus interprets this as the evil one, the devil) comes and steals these seeds away. Some people come, hear the Good News, almost immediately fall away and never return. Their nascent faith snatched away from them at the very beginning. Sad, very sad indeed. One fourth do not bother to come back to church; one fourth never produce any more seed for the Kingdom. Let those who have ears, hear! The **second fourth**, these seeds fall upon rocky ground, they spring up immediately, “*with joy*” as Jesus says (v. 20), but these people think they do not need to attend worship, nor pray, nor study God’s Word, nor fellowship with other Christians, so after a time, they fall away. They have no root, no depth to their faith, and a hard time comes, and they are tested, and they fall away from Jesus. They make a profession of faith, but they never become an active disciple following the Lord Jesus Christ on a daily basis, and so over time they wither and die spiritually and are gone. Let those who have ears, hear! The **third fourth** of the seeds fall among the thorns. And for a time they delight in the Word, and come to church, and follow the Lord Jesus. But the thorns come, and thorns are always Biblical symbols of sin, and they are beset by some sin, and they fall away. Their faith is choked by the weeds and thorns of their own sinfulness and they like the others die on the vine and fall away from following Jesus. Let those who have ears, hear! But the **last fourth** of the seeds fall on good ground, on great soil, and they not only grow but produce much fruit. The wheat that falls on good soil produces 100 fold, or 60 fold, or 30 fold. Indeed, one of the distinguishing factors of why these are seeds who have fallen on good soil is precisely that they produce so much of a harvest for the Kingdom of God. One seed in good soil equals 100 new seeds; or 60 new seeds; or at least 30 new seeds. No good seed, no good soil, no harvest. You know if

you're in this last fourth by the seeds of faith in others you produce with your own life of faith. No new seeds, no good soil, no good seed. Let those who have ears, hear!

So I want us to "DO THE MATH" in two ways now. First, please note that for every four seeds sown there will only be one that actually grows and produces new seeds. So, we can do the math and understand that if The Church of the Covenant produces 60 new members per year, that means that 240 seeds are being sown by our congregation. (one fourth of 240 equals 60) 800 members sowing 240 seeds over an entire year, producing 60 new members. Not a lot of seed-sowing going on, is there? Not a lot of inviting going on, is there? You know, people complain about the church being smaller than it used to be. But why would we ever suspect that it would grow if we personally were not sowing any seeds for the Kingdom? Do the math. If everyone decided to go from this service today and invite one person, just one person, to church, how many new members would we take in over the next year? We would take in 200 new members. That's the mathematical formula hidden in The Parable of the Sower. Now let's do the math another way. If good seed that falls on good soil (and according to Jesus this is the only seed that endures over time) if that good seed in good soil produces 100 fold, or 60 fold, or at least 30 fold, can we honestly say we have produced that much seed for the Kingdom? And if we're not producing fruit, then Jesus suggests in His parable, we're not the good seed having fallen on good soil. If we're not producing for the Kingdom then we're seed on the path, or in the rocks, or among the thorns. One good seed in good soil equals 100 or 60 or 30 new seeds being planted. And it tells us in which fourth of the seeds we are, by what we produce, or do not produce, for the Kingdom.

I have heard much "kavetching" over the years and much hand-wringing about the decline of the Presbyterian Church. Many theories are advanced –we don't connect with modern culture, bla-bla-bla, it's the decline of the mainline church, bla-bla-bla, it's the spiritual malaise within the church and within our society, bla-bla-bla...but could it be far more simple than all that? Could it be we have missed Jesus' truth in The Parable of the Sower? Could it be we have failed to Do the Math????? Maybe its as simple as just taking on a new discipline; maybe its amending our behaviors to reach different outcomes; maybe the decline of the church is just a mathematical formula pointing to the fact that nobody anymore is inviting anyone anymore to come to church????????? **Want to grow? Then sow.**

There's the "Little Bo Peep" version of seed-sowing. You know the old nursery rhyme, "Leave them alone, and they'll come home, wagging their tails behind them." Parents say that about their teenage children –"leave them alone and someday, somehow magically they will return." But they don't. We say that about college students with whom we lose contact over these important and formative years – "leave them alone and when they marry and have children somehow magically they'll return." But they don't. Inactive members, we just let them drift off and no one cares enough to call and even ask them why they're not here anymore –"leave them alone and they'll come home". But they don't. Older members now homebound, young married couples who join the church, our next door neighbor, our cousin, our best friend, someone broken and in need out there in our community –"leave them alone and they'll come home". But they don't. I seem to remember another of Jesus' parables about lost sheep. The good shepherd leaves the ninety and nine and goes in search of that one who is lost, and brings it back, carrying it physically. And the rejoicing over the recovery of that one lost sheep is great. I wonder, sometimes, which shepherd is it that we are called to follow? Little Bo Peep? Or the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ? **Do the math.** We really don't care about people if we don't care where they are going to spend eternity. Let them who have ears, hear. And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*