

Coram Deo  
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura  
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi  
Deo Volente

Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church

By the Rev Captain Dr. John S. Niles MSM

Delivered by: Barbara Hendren

# “Sometimes You Win Sometimes You Learn”

## *March 6, 2022*

Luke 8:4-15

### Sometimes You Win Sometimes You Learn - Part 1

Parables of Jesus

Sometimes you win, sometimes you learn. The parables of Jesus teach us the benefitting not just of winning but benefitting from our losses by learning. Sometimes you win sometimes you learn if you “have eyes to see and ears to hear” Jesus said.

The truth however, is that too often we don’t learn. We see that being worked out in Ukraine as the Russian military continue to invade –like the Nazi’s did in World War II and again by the USSR gobbling up Countries against their will after. And as the old saying goes, “if you keep doing what you have always done you will get what you always have gotten.” And I’ve discovered that if you don’t learn the lesson the first time the lessons get harder. And this lesson will get harder.

As a result of my reflection this and how the world is responding I was drawn to the parables of Jesus and the timeless life lessons found there.

Motivational writer Dennis Kimbro says that

- Some people are like wheels - they don't work unless they are pushed.
- Some people are like trailers - they have to be pulled.
- Some people are like kites - always up in the air, and if you don't keep a string on them, they'll fly away.
- Some people are like canoes - they have to be paddled.
- Some people are like blisters - they don't show up until the work is done.
- Some people are like balloons - always puffed up and so full of themselves.
- Some people are like flat tires - they have to be jacked up and changed.
- Some people are like lights - always switching off and on.

Yet, Jesus said that people are more like soil.

Someone suggested that the parable of the sower should be renamed the parable of the soil because the focus is on the soil or the hearer, and not on the sower. The two constant factors in the passage are the sower and the seed. The variable in the parable is the soil. The variable is how soil receives and responds to the seed.

Whether you take it from the standpoint of the soil or as the sower we see that there are four kinds of soil that yield four types of results. After which we are instructed to have ears to hear.

Sometimes you win, sometimes you learn especially when you are, firstly, **sincere in seeking**. *“While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: 5 “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up.” (Lk 8:4-5)*

The seeds that fell on the concrete floor had no sign of life, no chance to survive and no hope for cultivation. This ground represents situations and people we might encounter in life that *peddle empty promise*.

Perhaps you have encountered people that promised you the world but didn't even deliver a ham sandwich; and you ended up walking away empty handed. And you lost not only what was promised you, but also the time that was wasted and the energy you expended into the situation or relationship. And the problem is made worse when you come to realize that that was not the first time that it happened. It was not the first time you invested yourself into something or someone only to find out it was the wrong thing or person to invest yourself in.

It's then that the hard truth has to be faced and learned. Sometimes you win but if you aren't winning, and only losing out - in relationships and in life- then perhaps it is time to look at what could be learned.

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

Jesus invested his life into his disciples and into people. Yet, when he sent the disciples out 2 by 2 we find him saying Luke 10:1 *“when you come into a house pray peace on this house”* but if they do not receive you or what you have to offer Mark 6:11-12 tell the rest of the same story Jesus says *“... take that blessing back and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them and move on.”*

Now, understand the dust in a house is made up of hair and shed skin, food particles, of the people who live there. So Jesus was saying, do not even let the dust or any part of that situation or person come with you when you leave. Leave it all behind. Don't carry with you or be weighed down by it. And then sincerely seek better things and people to invest yourself into.

As we enter the Season of Lent, for some Christian traditions Ash Wednesday is formally observed. When the imputation of the Ashes are put on the head or hand, the minister says, *“Remember you are dust, and to dust you will return.”*

Now, if we are dust; and we go back to dust in the earth and the earth is but a star in the sky; then remember you are the stuff that stars are made of!

Or as Prospero said in the Tempest

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and  
Are melted into air, into thin air....  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve.....  
*(for) We are such stuff*  
*As dreams are made on; and our little life*  
*Is rounded with a sleep*

## II

And so Jesus urges us to be sincere in seeking don't waste your life on empty promises and secondly, **be steadfast in spirit**. "*Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture.*" (Lk 8:6)

The seeds that fell on the rock represent people and situations that have great potential but it is left unfulfilled. They were missing the thing that they needed to bring forth life.

A woman bought a parrot to keep her company but returned it the next day. "This bird doesn't talk," she told the owner. "Does he have a mirror in his cage?" he asked. "Parrots love mirrors. They see their reflection and start a conversation." The woman bought a mirror and left.

The next day she returned; the bird still wasn't talking. "How about a ladder? Parrots love ladders. A happy parrot is a talkative parrot." The woman bought a ladder and left.

But the next day, she was back. "Does your parrot have a swing? No? Well, that's the problem. Once he starts swinging, he'll talk up a storm." The woman reluctantly bought a swing and left.

When she walked into the store the next day, her countenance had changed. "The parrot died," she said. The pet store owner was shocked. "I'm so sorry. Tell me, did he ever say a word?" he asked. "Yes, right before he died," the woman replied. "In a weak voice, he asked me, 'Don't they sell any food at that pet store?'" (Leadership, Fall 1996)

What is it that you are putting in the soil of your life? Is it worthy of it, will it be something that will bring nourishment and so bring forth the fruit of life, love and salvation?

## III

Sometimes you win, sometimes you learn especially when you are sincere in seeking, steadfast in spirit, and also, **circumspect in your choices** "*...Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants.*"

Rabindranath Tagor the Nobel Laureate and Knight of the Empire said, "The song I came to sing was left unsung, I spent my life stringing and unstringing my instrument."

I hope he wrote that early in his life, for if he thought being a Nobel Laureate and a Knight of the Empire because of his work - what do the rest of us have if he thinks he spent his life stringing and unstringing his instrument?

But then again, we are all at the mercy of our own internal judge and we measure ourselves against the choices that might have been or the failures that were and choked off what could have been.

That is why the old Hebrerian prayer said, "Lord, take me over the tumult into your presence and there show me what I am, and what Thou has purposed me to be. Then hide me from Your tears.

There are many things in life that choke off ones potential.

The photographer for a national magazine was assigned to get photos of a great forest fire. Smoke at the scene hampered him and he asked his home office to hire a plane. Arrangements were made and he was told to go at once to a nearby airport, where the plane would be waiting. When he arrived at the airport, a plane was warming up near the runway. He jumped in with his equipment and yelled, "Let's go! Let's go!" The pilot swung the plane into

the wind and they soon were in the air.

"Fly over the north side of the fire," yelled the photographer, "and make three or four low level passes."

"Why?" asked the pilot.

"Because I'm going to take pictures," cried the photographer. "I'm a photographer and photographers take pictures!"

After a pause the pilot said, "You mean you're not the instructor?"

Some people and situations we invest in are not what they appear to be and they result in choking off time, resources and potential and sometimes much worse.

#### IV

Sometimes you win, sometimes you learn especially when you are sincere in seeking, steadfast in spirit, circumspect in your choices. And finally, when you are **good for something: so you can fulfilling your purpose.** *"Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Lk 8:8)*

Three ministers got together for coffee one day and found all their churches had a similar problem, that of a bat infestation. "I got so mad," said the first minister, "I took a shot gun and chased after them and fired at them. Unfortunately, it made holes in the ceiling, but did nothing to the bats." "I did it another way", said the second, "I tried trapping them alive and then I drove 50 miles before releasing them, but they beat me back to the church." "I haven't had any more problems," said the third. "What did you do?" asked the others, amazed. "It was rather easily, I simply baptized them, and I haven't seen them since."

There's a story about a local fitness center, which was offering \$1,000 to anyone who could demonstrate that they were stronger than the owner of the place. Here's how it worked. This muscle man would squeeze a lemon until all the juice ran into a glass, and then hand the lemon to the next challenger. Anyone who could squeeze just one more drop of juice out would win the money.

Many people tried over time other weightlifters, construction workers, even professional wrestlers, but nobody could do it.

One day a short and skinny guy came in and signed up for the contest. After the laughter died down, the owner grabbed a lemon and squeezed away. Then he handed the wrinkled remains to the little man.

The crowd's laughter turned to silence as the man clenched his fist around the lemon and six drops fell into the glass. As the crowd cheered, the manager paid out the winning prize and asked the short guy what he did for a living. "Are you a lumberjack, a weightlifter, or what?"

The man replied, "I work for the IRS."

I am only one, but I am one  
I cannot do everything, but I can do something  
And what I can do, I ought to do.  
And what I ought to do, by the grace of God I will do.  
I will do more than belong, I will participate  
I will do more than be fair, I will be kind

I will do more than believe, I will practice  
I will do more than dream, I will work  
I will do more than give I will serve  
I will do more than live, I will grow  
I will do more than be good; I will be good for something.  
You think about that. Amen.