

SERMON FOR JULY 16, 2023

TEXT: ISAIAH 55: 10-13 AND MATTHEW 13: 1-9

THEME: THE WORD WORKS WONDERS

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven  
and do not return there but water the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

**11**

so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. **2** And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. **3** And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. **4** And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. **5** Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, **6** but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. **7** Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. **8** Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. **9** He who has ears, let him hear."

In the name of Jesus:

One day an opossum visited his good friend, a raccoon, at his home near the river. The opossum marveled at his friend's lush garden and asked if he could grow one like it. The raccoon assured the opossum he could do so, although he cautioned him, "It is hard work."

The opossum eagerly vowed to do the hard work necessary, then asked for and received some seeds. He rushed home with his treasure, buried them amid much laughter and song, went inside to clean up, ate, and went to bed. The next morning he leapt from bed to see his new garden.

Nothing. The ground looked no different than it had the day before!

Furious with anger and frustration, the opossum shouted at his buried seeds, "Grow, seeds, grow!" He pounded the ground and stomped his feet. But nothing happened. Soon a large crowd of forest animals gathered to see who was making all the commotion and why. The raccoon came to investigate with all the others.

"What are you doing, Opossum?" he asked. "Your racket has awakened the whole forest."

The opossum railed about having no garden, then turned to each seed, and commanded it to grow. When the animals began to mock the opossum for his silly actions, he only screamed louder. At last the raccoon spoke up once more.

"Wait a minute, Possum," he said. "You can't make the seeds grow. You can only make sure they get sun and water, then watch them do their work."

The life is in the seed, not in you."

As the truth sank in, the opossum ceased his yelling and began to care for the seeds as the raccoon instructed, watering them regularly and getting rid of any weeds that invaded his garden. (On some days, though, when no one was watching, he still shouted a bit.)

Then one glorious morning the opossum wandered outside to see that multitudes of beautiful green sprouts dotted his garden. Just a few days later, gorgeous flowers began to bloom. With uncontrollable excitement and pride, the opossum ran to his friend, the raccoon, and asked him to witness the miracle. The raccoon took one long look at the thriving garden and said, "You see, Opossum, all you had to do was let the seeds do the work while you watched."

"Yes," smiled the opossum, finally remembering the wise words of his friend many days before, "but it's a hard job watching a seed work."

Today Jesus reminds you of what God does not only in the Parable of the Sower but also in the Old Testament lesson recorded in Isaiah. God sends His Word, plants the seed of faith, waters it with His Means of Grace so that it sprouts and produces abundant faith and good works in His Kingdom. God is

the One who creates faith in the hearts of His people, keeps them in the faith, and brings His faithful to the time of the harvest. God's Word brings about faith. This truth comes through loud and clear in this parable, but there is a corollary truth, a parallel truth, it is what we can call the other side of the coin, and that is, that LIVING AFFECTS HEARING.

It is absolutely true that we can add nothing to the Word of God to bring people to faith only God's Word brings people to faith in Christ. The Apostle Paul is consistent in saying that faith comes by hearing the Word of God and that it is God who works in you the will and ability to do that which God wills for you to do. While God gives faith and increases faith in and by the power of His Word, as sinful human beings you and I can certainly get in the way of God's Word. Jesus says that the seed that falls into the good soil produces tremendous fruit. But note what happens when the good seed falls on the rocky soil, or among the thorns? That seed gets choked off and fails to grow, it dries up and dies.

Look at your life. Are you receptive to the Word of God? Are you making yourself available to having God work in your life through the power of His Word? All too often the seed of God's Word gets choked off because you have too many thorns in your life. Carelessness in the use of the Word,

impatience in allowing the Word to work, laziness in hearing and reading the Word, indifference to the Word, worry, materialism, covetousness, and the seeking of pleasure all are thorns which choke off God's Word and its power and limits its success. When you place other things in priority over and against God's Word, God's Word gets limited and cannot grow.

Let me use two examples to show this. If you are hungry, what do you need to do? You need to get something to eat. Where do you go to get something to eat? At a place that deals in the distribution of food, a restaurant or a grocery store. If you don't go to these places to obtain food, and you go hungry, whose fault is that? The grocer? The cook? Or is it because of your laziness?

The same holds true if you need fuel for your car. Where do you go to obtain fuel? At a gas station, of course! But if you never go to a gas station or a place that distributes fuel, how can you have fuel for your auto? You can't. You need to go to the place where the goods are distributed to receive what is offered for your own good.

God wishes to give you His good gifts in His Word and Sacraments. Here through these Means God gives faith in Christ, offers forgiveness of all of your sins, gives strength to live your life to the glory of God, gives assurance that He is with you always, and gives you the certainty of eternal salvation. These are

the things, which you really need for God to give to you to support your body and life. And God has designed that sinners receive these gifts in God's House, also known as the Church or the Christian congregation. Here God gives the seed you need as a Christian to flourish.

But some of you don't think that it is all that important to go to church regularly. So you will go when your spirit moves you, when you feel like it, or when you get around to it. In doing so, you are just like the soil where the seed falls on rocky ground, or thorny ground, where your pleasures, the ideals of the world, or the carelessness and laziness of the world becomes more important than God's word. What happens when the seed falls on rocky soil or among the thorns? It doesn't accomplish what God intends!

So what are you to do? Listen to God. Repent! Turn from the world, your sinful desires, and trust in Christ. You are forgiven in Christ, empowered in your Baptism by the Spirit of God to live a new life. So live it! Seek first the Kingdom and God's righteousness. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. Christ has overcome sin, Satan, and death for you and has chosen you as His child. God's grace is for you. Jesus has really lived, died, and rose from the grave for YOU! He gives you His gifts in Christ today in Word, and in the Supper. The good soil is that which receives the seed from the Sower. God isn't the problem, the problem lies with sinners who

place their priorities elsewhere. Recognize your sins and realize what is keeping you from listening to and hearing the Word of Christ. Recognize the thorns, the rocks, and the weedy areas in your life and root them out! Repent. Confess your sins to God for He is faithful and just and will forgive you your sins in Jesus. Receive the forgiveness that Christ gives!

We live in a world of people with good intentions. But good intentions won't get it done. God has made you His child to make a difference in the world for Christ, and to make a difference in the world requires a high level of commitment to Christ.

In his book, *The One Minute Manager*, Ken Blanchard says, "There's a difference between interest and commitment. When you are interested in doing something, you do it only when it is convenient. When you are committed to something, you accept no excuses." Good soil represents the company of the committed " people who are determined to serve Christ to the best of their abilities, people who are willing to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to see Christ's kingdom come, people who by their work and their witness bear fruit that does not perish. What kind of soil are you? Make no excuses. Become a person who is immersed in the Word of God, for God's Word is the power to save to all who believe. As Isaiah explains, just as the rain and snow come down from heaven and brings growth to the grass, plants,

and crops, so too God's Word comes down from heaven to take root in your heart and bring forth in your life the fruits of faith in Christ. God works wonders in your life through Jesus, so be filled with Christ, grow in the grace of Christ, and live as God's child, loving God first and foremost and showing love to everyone, so that the seed that is planted will take root and bear abundant fruit. So be rooted in Christ, that you will be cleansed of your sins and live fruitful lives to the glory of God and in Jesus name.

Amen