

SERMON FOR SUN. JULY 12 AND WED. JULY 15, 2020

Pent 6A 2020 Matt 13, Isaiah 55. "A Promised Harvest"

Dear fellow redeemed, in our readings today, we are presented with an apparent logical inconsistency: God's Word is all-powerful and yet it can be resisted.

These truths seem to contradict one another. If God's Word is all-powerful, then wouldn't it follow that it cannot be resisted? And if God's Word can be resisted, doesn't that mean that it is not all-powerful? Yet, our readings this morning call us as Christians to believe both propositions: God's Word is all-powerful even though it can be resisted.

The Old Testament reading from Isaiah, shows us that God's Word is all-powerful. Isaiah proclaims God accomplishes what God wants through His Word.

"For as the rain and snow come down from Heaven and do not return there but water the earth, so shall my Word be, it shall not return to me empty but it shall accomplish that which I purpose." So, God's Word is all-powerful, and God accomplishes what He desires with it.

Yet, in the gospel reading, Jesus tells the parable of the sower and teaches His disciples that God's all-powerful Word can be resisted. The sower goes out to sow and some of the seeds are snatched away, some are scorched, and some are choked. Only a portion of the seed produces grain.

When you hold these two readings together, you encounter a paradox of faith. God speaks an all-powerful word that can be resisted. Yet this apparent inconsistency helps us make sense of the tension we see in the ministry of Jesus, and in our lives today.

Today and for the next two weeks, we'll hear 3 parables from Matthew 13. To understand these parables, we need to understand the context: Jesus spoke them in the face of much rejection and persecution.

Earlier, Jesus spoke and disciples followed. Now, however, He is beginning to encounter resistance. Pharisees challenge His miracles and question His teachings. Earthly rulers oppose the Kingdom. Jesus warns His disciples of future opposition and denounces the cities who reject Him.

Yet, amid demonic forces, earthly powers, and skeptical religious leaders who resist His teaching, Jesus continues in God's mission.

And so today and for the next two weeks, we will learn that as long as the Church is in this world,

(1.) God's Word will be under attack; (2.) God's people will be under attack; and (3.) God's word is the source of our hope in troubled times.

Today's Gospel contains the Parable of the Sower. And notice that this parable is not only spoken by Jesus here, but as he speaks, he's literally sowing his Word.

In Jesus' telling, the Sower went out and sowed his seed very liberally. He is seemingly reckless with his seed, not caring where it lands, but scattering it to fall where it may.

That's what Jesus is doing as He scatters the seed of His Word to the **“great crowds.”** Who were these **“great crowds?”**

They were all kinds of people – the devout, the curious, the super-religious, the seekers, the skeptics, the Jewish opposition, the tax collectors and sinners – they were people of all stripes and ways of life, not unlike all of us gathered here this morning.

Jesus scatters His Word, His seed, into the ears and hearts of all these people– not only to those who He thinks will give the greatest return on investment, but to all.

For the seed is the Word that is the power of God for salvation. **The Word which Isaiah tells us does not return to God empty, but just like the rain and the snow, accomplishes all for which God sends it.**

And what happens when this Word is sown? ***It comes under attack.*** Because we are not the only ones who know that the Word is the power of God for salvation – Satan knows it too.

And so as soon as the Word is sown, it comes under attack by the devil, by the world, and by our own sinful nature.

And so first, some of the seed falls on the path. This, Jesus says, is His Word that has been sown into our ears and into our hearts, but has met with resistance. It has not taken root.

Why? Because hearts that are accustomed to walking in the wisdom and ways of the world become hardened by sin. Such hearts are tired of the same old worship, of hearing the same old Gospel.

Such Hearts hear the Word of God but wonder if it is really relevant for our day and age, maybe we should modify it?

Such hearts hear the Word of God and think how much “others” really need to hear this!

Such hearts that are stubborn and resistant, feeling no need to repent, no hunger or thirst for God's Word, but are rather enjoying the wide and easy path of the ways of this world. . . . Hearts . . . well, hearts like ours at times.

And from such hearts Satan is more than happy to come and completely devour the Word.

If you do not want God's Word and His free and unconditional forgiveness, His delivery from death and the grave, God does not force it to stay, and allows it to be snatched away. **PAUSE**

Next some of the seed falls on rocky ground – a little bit of dirt that's not very deep, and with rocks underneath. Here the seeds spring up quickly, but cannot stand the heat.

And so, it is, Jesus says, with His Word that springs up quickly in the hearts of those who hear it with joy, but it is never allowed to take root. For them, God's Word is embraced as long as things are going well or it doesn't become too intrusive on the rest of my life, ***as long as it is convenient.***

But such a Word can be snatched away before it takes root, Satan attacks with the heat of persecution. He uses our jobs, our families, our neighbors, our prejudices, our doubts, and our own sinful nature to turn up the heat, shriveling our faith. **PAUSE**

And then there is the seed that falls among the thorns. Here the seeds spring up, and even take root and begin to grow, but there is competition. False truths and words of worldly wisdom that tell us to look out for #1, are striving for our attention, seeking to take

root in our hearts. They are, as Jesus says, “**the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches.**”

Satan uses such things to raise doubt and fear and anxiety, causing us to wonder, **Did God really say? Can God’s word truly be trusted? Why do I suffer and the wicked prosper?**

Satan uses these cares to attack the Word from without, seducing us with the promises of wealth and happiness.

But they are making promises that they cannot deliver, for they are the voice of **the Father of Lies**, using our own heart and minds and desires against us, so that the Word is choked out as we listen to them instead of the Voice of our Shepherd.

And how Satan loves all the confusion! The Word is under attack. And in fact, so many and varied are these attacks that it is a wonder that the seed of God’s Word grows at all! **PAUSE**

And yet, it does! There is good soil, in which the Word grows and bears fruit. An abundance of fruit. You are that soil that God would make into fruitful soil. You cannot do it yourself – only God in the person of your Savior Jesus Christ can.

For He was the seed that was planted in the ground in death that sprang forth and is producing a crop still!

He is the seed that Satan, try as He might, could not choke or scorch or snatch away.

And just as Christ’s blood and water spilled into the ground from His side on the cross, so His water and blood still work in the ground of our hearts to make us into fruitful soil.

He works in us through His Word, the Law breaking up the hardness of our hearts, so that we trust in Him alone.

He weeds out our pride and delusions of self-sufficiency, all that is competing for our allegiance, that we hear the seductions and lies of the devil for what they are – death dealing lies.

And none of this is easy, this tilling and turning of the soil that is your heart! Throw in the attacks of Satan, striving also for your heart and soul, and it can seem almost too much to bear!

Yet just when it seems as if you’re about to go under, the seed of Christ, sown into your heart, grows. You drink deeply of the water of your baptism through repentance and absolution.

You are fed with the body of Christ and drink of the blood of Christ. And in broken, repentant hearts grow the seeds of faith.

Roots deep and strong in well-tilled soil hear the Words of the Lord, **“It is finished... I forgive you all your sins... My Word does not return to me empty. . . Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. . . In my Father house are many mansions. . . Have no fear, little flock!”**

And from the death of sin we are raised with Christ. Seeds that have died and were buried, now sprung up into a new life.

And in Christ we are a new creation. In Christ, our soiled hearts full of the entanglements of sin are turned and tilled into good soil. In Christ, we are well-watered and well-fed.

And His Word accomplishes that which he wills. Again, it isn't easy or pleasant, for as long as we live in this world, we who cling to the Word will be attacked. **PAUSE**

Dearly beloved, Christianity no longer has the status it once had in our culture. While some remember the good God has done through the church, others attack our beliefs as destructive of a common, public life.

Whether it be accusations that Christianity has been used to subjugate women, to silence science, to foster racism, to fuel homophobia, news-feeds and social media posts are full of ideas that resist the words and works of Jesus.

In such a world, it is easy to wonder how long we can go on. Jesus, however, reminds us, God Word is all-powerful.

Rather than retreat into the safe havens of our congregations, rather than hide our faith from public notice, Jesus encourages us to trust in the Spirit's work through the Word. Even though this Word can be resisted, it will accomplish the growth God desires in His Kingdom.

We know this because Jesus is the Word made flesh, who encountered deadly resistance. He died under the attacks of this world upon God's Word. But God raised Him from the dead and Jesus sent forth His people proclaiming His Word to reach all nations, bringing the Kingdom of God to the ends of the world.

We cannot control the resistance of people to God's Word, but we can trust in God's power and promise to work through His Word.

So, while many hear this parable and think, What kind of soil and I, in fact Jesus' words, turns our eyes outward.

It asks us to look out the windows of our churches and see how the word is being stolen from some by Satan, how it is being scorched among others who begin to follow but fall away, and how it is being choked out by those who prefer the pleasures of the world rather than the poverty of the Kingdom.

Yet if we continue to look out the windows and see all the suffering and resistance, we will soon see a familiar figure walking on the distant horizon.

Jesus, the sower, continuing to walk amid such great opposition, and continuing to speak His Word and do His work, trusting that, even though it is being resisted, this is still God's all-powerful Word and it brings about His Kingdom, where and when God desires.

But we have God's promise that His Word will produce a harvest. Through Word and Sacrament, He will produce an abundant harvest, in you. Good seed sprouting in good soil.

So come, Lord Jesus! Work in our hearts through your Word, establishing in us the deep roots of your Gospel, that we live in you alone. **AMEN**