

Pastor T.C. Arnold
12th Sunday after Trinity
August 18th, 2013
Isaiah 29:17-21

Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest?

These words open the Old Testament reading appointed for this the 12th Sunday after Trinity. These words are a bit odd – turning forests into fields and vice-versa. What does it mean? Really, it's not that difficult. All you need to do is read the rest of Isaiah to figure it out. But since we don't have the time or opportunity to read the rest of Isaiah this morning, I will just tell you. You see, the forest of Lebanon is referred to five other times in Isaiah as a symbol of might and strength. As a matter of fact, it makes perfect sense when we look closer at the rest of the Old Testament reading and then also the Gospel reading.

Lebanon was the name of a mountain range north of Palestine which was known for his high white peaks and its vast forest. When one turns a forest into a field and a field into a forest, things really change. So, likewise, when one turns a deaf man to hear or a blind man to see. What was completely dark... what was silent... is now able to see shapes, sizes, marvelous works of the Lord as well as hear upon the Words sweetly spoken to the ears... sweet words of life in the Gospel. God has a way of turning things around – a divine reversal.

Israel was compared to Lebanon and its forest of might. Israel has been seen as God's special people and they always thought of themselves that way as well. However, the words of judgment from Isaiah change all that. "*The forest will be turned into a field.*" That's bad. The mighty cedars are what give Lebanon its strength and might. Cut them down and turn it into a field and we have stripped it of all its strength, its standing, and might. Israel, in judgment, will be as Lebanon without its cedars. Israel, in her unfaithfulness and waywardness, will be condemned by God. She will be a stripped field, not a mighty forest.

Here's the divine reversal...the forest will grow where the field was. Here is the picture our Lord is giving us in both the Old Testament text and the Gospel. "*The deaf will hear*" is the theme in both readings. How will they hear? God will make them hear. He will unstop their ears. He calls hearing into being with a word – His Word – in the Gospel. And in the Old Testament reading... well, it's a Word again. Isaiah says, "*In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book...*" It's the Word again that causes the deaf to hear. The word opens our ears and even opens our eyes to the precious gifts God desires to give to you.

What is it in our lives that turns our forests into fields? What is it that causes our ears to be stopped up and eyes to be covered in blindness? It's the same thing God warned Israel about in the Old Testament text. Even God's people forget about the mighty cedars of Lebanon – that is, His providence – and begin to rely on our own means to take care of our problems. Instead of opening our ears to the truth spelled out for us in the law of God, we find it much easier to just not think about it – keep our ears closed. We don't want to see, have our sins brought to light before our very eyes, so we like to go through life with blinders on – any way we can make sure to only see what we want to see rather than what we need to see. That's the way we are. We want to go through life with ear plugs and blind folds.

I don't want to hear it. I don't want to hear mom and dad tell me that what I'm doing is wrong – even if they are right. I don't want hear pastor preaching the law to me because I feel like

he is talking to me when he says I'm a sinner. Guess what – I am. And those words are the same to me as well. I don't want to look and see with my eyes what the Bible might say about my behavior, about the way I feel about my neighbor, about what I keep thinking I might try to do. I don't want to see with eyes wide open because I might not like what I see. I'm scared and I don't like to hear it.

We are afraid of what the Lord might say to us. We are scared of what the Lord might look like if we dare to gaze at Him. Why? Because we have already convicted ourselves... without first knowing that in Jesus, our ear plugs come out and the blindfold is taken off.

This is what our Jesus wants us to hear and see. The Gospel desires to pierce through the ear plugs and remove the blindfold. The Gospel is central for you. It wants you to hear the shouts of the crowds that loved Him and also the shouts of those that hated him. The Gospel is heard when joy is pronounced as well as when hammers can be heard beating in nails through flesh on the cross. The Gospel shows you that Jesus heals the sick and raises the dead. The Gospel shows you so you can see with your eyes wide open what Jesus went through, carrying that load of a cross to Calvary's holy mount. The ear plugs are out, the blind fold is off and Jesus makes you a great people. Your field is raised up to a forest – mighty and strong in the Lord.

By God's grace we have a forest that has been raised to life by our Lord. In our sins we are a desolate field. But God produces the mighty forest – and it's ours – even when days are difficult for us. It is still ours. And with this forest of life for His people, we can do so much. For example, next Sunday is a busy Sunday – all you have to do is look on the calendar part of your bulletin this morning. Along with all the activities going on in the afternoon, we have a Friendship Sunday opportunity next Sunday. We are not putting on a special program – It will be the same Word of God coming to you. The Outreach committee made little invitation cards that you can give to someone you know and say, I would love for you to come to church with me next Sunday. It's an opportunity to bring a neighbor or a friend to hear how God pulls out ear plugs and takes off blind folds. Also, to hear how He makes fields in to mighty forests. The Word of God will do the work. The Holy Spirit does the work through you. I encourage you to invite someone you know to church with you next Sunday – or even the Sunday after that.

Isaiah says, *"In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see."* In the days of Isaiah, 700 years before the birth of Jesus, the most downtrodden members of society are most likely these type of people referred to here – deaf and blind. So, when God says the deaf will hear and the blind will see it's clear what God wants for even the least of the world. His preaching was not for a certain kind of people or certain amount of people – but for all people. And no longer will the preaching of God's Word fall on hard dry ground where no forest can come forth. But rather, the seed of the Word raises the dead to life. You are that mighty forest of life made so by Christ.

Share it. His Word of life is seed to be shared. His seed of life is blood poured out for you. His making of a forest out of a field began at your blessed Baptism. May God richly bless you and keep you each of your days in this precious gift. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.