

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
Sexagesima  
Isaiah 55:10-13  
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“...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field” (Gen 3:17b-18). Does this passage sound at all familiar to you? Perhaps apart from the passage’s context it does not. We had a reference to it in last Sunday’s sermon. These were the words the Lord used to explain to Adam and Eve how things were going to be now that they have disobeyed the command of the Lord. Soon after Eve took that forbidden fruit from the tree – soon after she gave it to her husband – soon after they ate, the Lord had these words for them, “*cursed is the ground because of you.*”

But Isaiah gives us a picture of “paradise restored” in verse thirteen (the last verse of the Old Testament text for today). Where “thorns and thistles” inhabit the land because of the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden, now, because of the Lord’s salvation, the plants of Eden will spring up again, and the Lord’s people are brought back to the lush garden. So Isaiah says (v. 13), “*Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier (thistle) shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the Lord an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*”

In days that are not so optimistic, these are optimistic words from Isaiah. But don’t be fooled. Isaiah had his days of darkness and “words of woe” as well. For example, the first part of the book that bears the prophet’s name is made up of much of it. In Isaiah 8:20-22 he warns, “*If they do not speak according to the word, they have no light of dawn. Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.*”

But Isaiah doesn’t leave it there – not even for one moment. The very next verse begins the ninth chapter and Isaiah says, “*Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.*” So many times the darkness that vales our life does not come in the unbelief that God doesn’t fulfill promises. Rather, much of the time for us darkness comes in the form of waiting for God’s word of promise to be carried out. In other words, it’s not a question of “if” for many Christians – it’s a question of “when”. So, what do we do while “waiting” on God?

Well, we could do what Isaiah does. We could take refuge in the ways and wisdom of God, and not in “*our thoughts*” or “*our ways.*” That’s what Isaiah explains just two verses prior to the text appointed for this day, “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.*” That’s the promise which is sometimes difficult for us to accept – but it doesn’t make it any less true.

You see, God’s perspective is a lot higher than ours. God’s historical track record is a lot longer than we could ever imagine. So, when it comes to water that descends from the heavens and then dries up – that water was not a waste. When the Word of God flows forth from His servants for the purpose for which God intends, it does not return to our Lord without doing what God intended for it to do. While we may not understand – God’s purpose and work is being carried out – with rain watering the earth (even when we don’t think we need it) and with the Word proclaimed to the nations (even when we think it is falling of deaf ears).

With that in mind – the Word of God going out and not returning to Him empty – think about the Gospel reading for today. Jesus speaks a parable about a farmer who scatters seed. How much of the seed actually takes root in the good soil? Well, if we were going to take a literalistic view of what Jesus said in this story – only 25% of the seed prospers. The other 75% gets scorched, trampled on, or eaten up. In other words, most of the seed does not prosper. Yet, when we look at Isaiah 55, the Lord clearly says that as the rain goes forth to carry out a particular purpose and the Word gets spoken for a particular purpose – sometimes we aren't always real clear on how all that works out. It would seem the parable makes the point that God's Word is *less efficacious* than the way Isaiah describes it. But the parable is also a lesson. The parable helps us to understand what Isaiah is talking about.

This is the point (for both the parable and Isaiah): there are a lot of folks, even within the people of God (and us today) who just don't get it.

How can God scatter seed and most of it not take root and yet Isaiah says that what goes out of God's mouth will not return to Him empty and will accomplish what He desires and achieve God's purpose for which it was sent? How can rain and snow cover the earth – sometimes with flood or blizzard – and be understood as God's goodness rather than destruction or disaster? We don't get it – and for that reason we might think that most of what our Lord says or does is much like “a parable” that might not be understood by any of us. At least in the Gospel lesson for today, we are given an explanation to the parable. Most of the time we are just left wondering – confused by life's mysteries – by the way that God waters the earth to bring about “bread to the eater” or sends out His Word that does not return to Him empty. How could it work to God's glory in every situation?

That's where we say – I don't get it. When life's mysteries challenge us and we can't make sense of God's wisdom perhaps it would be advantageous to try to understand what Paul was saying to the church in Corinth. Paul says, *“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preached to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles ... For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”*

Paul would point out that in God's complete foolishness, He is still wiser than man. In God's complete weakness He is still stronger than man. So it is folly, beloved in the Lord, to try to understand with our minds how God waters the earth – when all we see is a flood. It is folly to try to understand how God feeds His people, when all we see is the seed eaten up by the birds or being stepped on by those who wish to see it take no root. It's our foolishness to try to figure all this out with our wisdom. The reason – God's wisdom is beyond our wisdom. Remember Isaiah 55:8, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.”* The Lord knows what He is doing, even when we don't.

God reconciles our heart to His in the folly that looks like God dying on a tree. Not just looking like it – but doing it. Wisdom cannot make sense of it – but love can. From a garden where it all began, to a hill called Calvary where it all came to completion – we don't get it. But love understands. The promise is held by the faith that Christ creates in you. God's will is carried forth in love and not in our heads. The Lord bleeding to death on a tree is indeed folly to those who think they can rationalize all that happens. It cannot be done. So we rely on what we do know. The world did not know God through wisdom, as Paul pointed out to the church in Corinth. But it does know God through the Word. All of life's mysteries remain when our mind is left to ponder the will of God apart from our heart of

faith. But when we include the love and faith that Christ provides – it all becomes clear. The Lord's Words will not return to Him empty.

His ways are not our ways – but His ways are clear and simple. His way was to die for you. That's not to be grasped with the head – but with the heart – with a Godly love that goes beyond understand. And so If God could die for you and would die for you and we are still left wondering why – could He now also water the earth and sow the seed without your understanding also? Amen.

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