

Sermon for Sexagesima Sunday – Luke 8:4-15

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

There's something different about God's Word in comparison with our human words. God's Word has power. It accomplishes that which it says. When the Lord speaks His Word, it is not only a message to proclaim, but it is His responsibility to fulfill. The prophet Isaiah said it well: "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, 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." The Word fulfills that which it came to do. The faithful centurion with an ailing servant understood this best. "Lord ... only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." In other words, if I, a mere man, can cause action by my simple words, you, who are God in the flesh, can certainly do all things through only the Word you speak.

In this way, God acts through His word. He did so in the creation of the world. Out of nothing He spoke forth everything. The Word proceeded from the mouth of the Father and creation became reality. He commanded and it was done. The Lord also acted through the prophetic Word. The prophets proclaimed the Word that kills and brings to life; that brings down to the depths and raises up.

But the Scriptures are also the Word of God that goes forth and does not return empty. They are more than a collection of teachings. They are more than an account of stories from dead Jews. In the Scriptures, God speaks to us. This is not a word that is limited to any particular time or people; His Word is given for our sakes. His Word is spoken for our instruction. His Word is for all nations and for all generations. Through the Word, God teaches, reproves, corrects, and trains in righteousness. He sends His Word against our hearts. By it, fire consumes our self-centered idolatry. The Word crushes our hearts like a hammer crushing rock. It is living and active and sharper than a two-edged sword.

So this begs the question: What about the Word in your life? Is it going to waste? Do you recall what was said in the first reading? The second? What about what was said in the Gospel reading today? How about what was preached 60 seconds ago? Our Lord says clearly in explaining the parable of the Sower and the Seed that the Seed is the Word of God. "... Some fell along path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and ... it withered away... and some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it." Martin Franzmann said it this way: "Though some be snatched and some be scorched/ And some be choked and matted flat, the Sower sows; his heart cries out, 'Oh, what of that, and what of that?'"

As you may have guessed, the problem never is with the seed. It accomplishes that to which it was purposed. It succeeds in the thing for which it was sent. The problem exists with the soil. That's our hearts. Our hearts are the rocky and thorn-infested soil in which the Word of God can hardly grow. We may like to imagine that we are the good soil. We imagine that we avoid all the rocks, and thorns, and sins. But "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." The enemies of Christ are real and continually work to destroy the gift of forgiveness that we receive. The devil and his birds really do devour the word before it reaches our hearts. The world with all its vaunted pleasures really does choke out faith. Our rocky self-centered hearts make it impossible for any sort of growth in God's Word whatsoever, let alone for the Word to take root.

And yet, this parable of the Sower and Seed breaks down a little. No farmer would waste his precious seed like this farmer does. But our Lord in His Word is no typical farmer. The Sower of the seed of God's Word is no regular sower. He never tires of sowing His Word that is trampled, forgotten, and ignored. And also, this Word that He sows is no ordinary seed. It actually makes the dry, dusty, rocky, thorn-infested sand of our hearts to be fertile soil. And though our hearts return often to that desolate state, He never stops sowing. He makes the Seed grow. He protects it with His Hand. He chases the enemy's birds away. He pulls out the weeds. He makes the Word take deep root. He makes it bear fruit that honors His Name and benefits our neighbors. The Sower never stops sowing.

So hold on to the Word, dearly beloved. Gather it in. Don't let it sit on the ground for the devil to snatch away. Don't let persecution or hard times cause you to lose hope. Get yourself ready for the time of trial and testing. How? By getting yourself to Church as you have today. Come to where the Word of God is poured out in reading, hymn, liturgy, preaching, and sacrament. Here is where God gives Himself to you, where He promises to be for you. And then proclaim the Word, the Good News to others, on the highways and byways, hallways and office buildings. Preach it from the pulpits of your vocations as husband and father, wife and mother, son or daughter, employee or employer, student or teacher, neighbor and friend. Don't give up on it. Don't be ashamed of it. You might not see the results you'd like. It doesn't matter. Not everyone will come to faith. But everyone is loved by Christ and reconciled to the Father by His Death and Resurrection. Maybe you won't see any results in your family, neighbors, and co-workers. Maybe your sowing will annoy them and cause them to hate you. Keep sowing anyway. Sow on the path, on the rocky ground, and among the weeds. Don't judge the ground, just sow it. Who knows if God will soften the path, clear the rocks, and pull up the weeds? He did so for you. His Word accomplishes that for which it is sent. He will save others.

For the Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is the center of our faith. By it you have a good and noble heart. By it your sins are forgiven. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠