

SEXAGESIMA

February 19 2017

Old Test: Is. 59:10-13

Epistle: 2 Cor. 11:19-12:9

Gospel: Luke 8:4-15

Standing...

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

At the end of our Gospel lesson Jesus speaks of having "ears to hear."
These are ears that hear things in terms of Jesus, His death and resurrection.
It's ears attuned to the Word, listening for the voice of the Shepherd.
Might we all have these ears of faith this morning...

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Sitting...

Jesus is telling parables, and we have just heard the first one. The first of 46.
However we, thanks be to God, have been given the interpretation.

But what if we didn't have the interpretation?
What if we didn't know that Christ is the Sower and that the seed He casts are His sayings?

What if we didn't know that the birds in the parable are demons,
or that the thorns represent the cares of this life?

Without an interpretation,
we would scratch our heads in confusion and worse create our own interpretations.
Yet, this is what I need you to understand.
Parables are not meant to make things clear. They are riddles.
Psalm 78 calls them dark sayings.
They are told so as to obscure the message—to make the truth harder to grasp.

What?! Didn't Jesus always teach in parables?
No He did not.

When Jesus started His ministry His teachings were very, very clear.
Everything was straightforward.

Yet, He began teaching in parables when people rejected Him.
When people would not look upon Him as the Messiah—
When they looked to Him for entertainment purposes or to provide a free meal—
Or—or, when religious leaders said He was in league with the Devil—

That's when the truth began to be concealed from them.
The truth that was once very clear and straightforward is now—on purpose—made
confusing and difficult to grasp. His disciples even ask Him, "Why are you teaching in
parables?" Jesus explains that He does this so that seeing the masses would not see
and hearing they would not hear, nor comprehend.

Now that's not to say parables aren't instructive. They are.
With the interpretation, parables offer a different perspective, a new worldview.
Helping us to understand what God and His Kingdom are like.

Yet, even with the correct interpretation, sometimes the em-pha-sis can be put on the
wrong sy-l-la-ble.

For example, I was taught this parable represented four different sorts of people, the
fourth of which was—well one with a good and noble heart. That's the kind of person I
was supposed to be—good and noble. For what reason? To fear-fruit silly! "You want
to bear fruit, don't' you?!"

"Well, sure I do!"

Then it's up to *you* to become worthy enough to do so.

Thus, my job was to make my heart good soil—make my heart good dirt.

And boy, was I some good dirt.

Even though my lips moved along with the music being sung at church,
my heart much of the time was far from God.

And even though I talked about holiness and morality and good works—
that was what other people were supposed to do.

And though I said all the right Christ-centered things in public,
in private, I did whatever self-centered thing I wanted to do.

I was good dirt alright.

Put me in a bag, I would have been nothing more than a good dirt bag.

What I wasn't taught to consider is that even
the very best dirt cannot bear a single fruit by itself.
By itself the best of soil is just as barren and fruitless as
the path, the rocks and the weedy ground.

The seed produces the fruit.

Thus, it's the seed that matters most.

As we heard in Isaiah,

"His Word does not return void but accomplishes that for which it was sent."

However, all of this makes the Sower's way of sowing so odd.

We think, "What a waste!"

If this is precious seed

why waste it where it's only going to give birds a free lunch?

Agh—there goes another handful—bouncing off of the rocks.

Ump—there goes another handful tossed into a weed patch.

No sane Sower throws seed all over the place like this.

To us, it seems so wasteful.

So inefficient.

But the reality is, the history of the world is the story of His sowing—

of His scattering divine grace and mercy

all the way back to the days of Adam and Eve.

Ever since then there have been those to despise the Word

but there have also been seedlings which have poked through the soil;

in the Abel's, the Noah's, the Jonah's, the Rahab's,

the Saul's who become Paul's,

even the soldier at the cross who confesses,

"Truly this Man was the very Son of God."

The Sower sows His seed over the spans of the millennia, over the course of the century,
and the decade, over the week and yes, even over this very day—right now.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Handful after handful, no life, no person, no soil is left unsown.

This Sower sows His Word of forgiveness in back alleys, brothels, corporate offices, even in the halls of government. He casts it into crack houses and prisons, front-line trenches and fraternity houses.

The Word is preached whether men like it or like it not.
 Whether they listen or listen not.
 Whether they believe it or believe it not.
 The Divine Sower casts the word of Jesus,
 the good news that in Jesus there is forgiveness, life, and salvation.

You see, no ground is declared undeserving of the Sower's seeds.
 He just keeps on sowing.
 And get this: It's not about the quality of the dirt.

When we think of the quality of the dirt, we are rarely just one type of soil.
 We are all four.
 The four soils are descriptive of how we live and relate to others and to God.
 Most of us know the beaten path of life—
 of hearing the Gospel and it pinging right off our hardened, refusing heart.
 Most of us have stumbled through the rocky patches of life,
 where we hear for a moment but give up when tempted.
 And all of us have all been scratched and cut by the thorns of life.
 Most of us here have heard the Word of God and yet still succumbed
 to false belief, despair and other great shame and vice.

See, if this Sower was like you, or like me—
 we would have given up on us a long, long time ago.
 Why throw the seed in his direction, or hers? They aren't going to believe.
 No fruit will ever come from them...

Beloved, the good news is this.
 This Sower does not look for good and noble hearts.
 He simply looks for hearts, hearts corrupted, hearts weary, hearts afraid.
 Because He only saves sinners—sinners like you.

He's reckless, casting His seed of mercy over your thorns and thistles, over your rock and gravel, over your deadness and hardness—handful after handful. And get this! He throws it knowing full well that some of it will be snatched away by Satan—the birds— or scorched out of you by the world, or choked out of you by your own sinful desires.

Yet He keeps on sowing. But why?

Because this Sower is good and gracious and merciful toward you. That's who He is. Slow to anger, quick to forgive. He wants you, no matter what you are or what you've been, to receive the word of your Father's forgiveness, to receive this precious seed and have life take root within you. To have true joy as His seed produces within you abundant fruit.

So let this parable of His boundless and reckless grace sink down deep. He sows and He sows some more until the costly seed of God's grace and mercy take root in you. He does it all so that you might believe His Word, for He is your Savior—proving His love for you in Him giving Himself upon the cross.

Gang, this is no ordinary seed.
This is no ordinary Word.
And this is certainly no ordinary Sower.

Here what He says, and believe.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Amen.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sitting...