

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“As he [Jesus] said these things, he called out, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear.’”

“Beware a theology of adjectives” was a common phrase one of my seminary professors used to say. What he meant was beware those things that try to put an adjective before a topic or word where it shouldn’t be such as “dynamic worship,” “relevant preaching,” “breakthrough stewardship” or “contextual study” These things are fancy ways of trying to pull the wool over the eyes of God’s people to think there is something that can be added to how God operates which is to say God doesn’t do a good job at what he does or at least how he says he works. The old man though likes adjectives because we think the more you pile on the better or more effective something must be.

This isn’t to say, however, that adjectives don’t have their place. Words are used to described things, and they need to be used when they are supposed to be. Isaiah, for instance, talks about the Suffering Servant when he speaks of Jesus. The Lord isn’t just a servant but one who suffered for the sake of his people. In today’s readings, all three of them, we can rightly use a number of adjectives to describe God’s word. It is effective, dynamic, and sufficient. All these things, though, place the emphasis and work where it rightly belongs, God’s word. This is because when it comes to God’s word it’s more than just some words on a page or verbal syllables traveling through the air. God’s word comes from God himself, and it does what he sends it to do. He just flat out says this in the reading from Isaiah, “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.” Likewise, Good’s word is all sufficient, there’s nothing that needs added to it, and it is efficacious, it does something to and for people.

This Sunday of the Church Year is all about this as we hear these readings. Last week God proclaimed to you how you are saved by God’s grace alone and today the Lord shows how this salvation is given or distributed through the Holy Scriptures alone, which is to say through his word. This is an important thing, then, for you to consider and take to heart that God’s word is both the substance and the actor in all of this. God works through this means of grace to deliver to you Christ and his benefits.

Jesus said in this parable. “And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.” As he said these things, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Considering this text is first to see that God preaches to you. That may sound a bit simple, but it’s easily overlooked. God preaches his word in your life, and this is nothing short of miraculous when you think about it. In the Old Testament reading, the Prophet Isaiah was inspired by God to write, “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.” God sends out his word and accomplishes his purposes. He sows the seed and he, is the one who grants the growth and increase. This is God’s work, and it is marvelous.

But why is it then, we take this for granted or we hear his word, and it doesn’t take root. Jesus warns you by way of three things when he explains the parable. “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are

those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.”

You can pick your poison, so to speak, when it comes to what happens to the seed in the parable. Despising the word of God takes on many different forms but all of them lead to the same end, destruction. All those reasons where the word of God is trampled, devoured, withers, and choked make sense. Jesus tells us, “The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard. Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.”

There's no guessing here or leaving you in suspense of what happens. It's from the very mouth of Jesus himself. The devil attacks God's people and God's word. People fall away when hard times come because their faith was shallow and just a fair-weather faith. There are also those who get caught up with the cares and riches and pleasures of life. Their faith takes a back seat to the world and never does anything. It's a dead faith. All of those should terrify you when you hear Jesus speak those words because you hear that and look at your lives and the lives of your family and you see these things not just as a parable heard in church but something firsthand in your life.

This is where you see the warning and examine your life according to what Jesus said? Do you have cares in this life? Are the devil and his minions around trying to choke out your faith in Christ? Are you tempted to ignore God's word and get caught up in what's going on around you? Is this world defining how you live your life or is God's word the lamp that lightens the path on which you walk through this world? As one who is a regular hearer of the word are you tempted to grow complacent and apathetic and view your Christian faith in light of or defined by the fruits rather than the word such as the experience it creates in your life such as how it makes you feel or what you think it should make you feel rather than looking to God's word regardless of what you may think you get out of it or the response you may have at that momentary instant? Expand this out as well to beyond just yourself and to the church. Does the church measure its faithfulness according to its numbers, its preferences, and other factors or does it examine itself according to if God's word is being preached and taught faithfully? So, then, are you excluded from this proclamation of warning in the parable? No. Stay awake, watch out. Repent.

Those are warnings to each of us lest we become that seed taken away, fall away from the faith, or simply have a dead faith that doesn't produce rather it just goes through the motions. All of these are eternally deadly. All of these you are warned against lest you fall prey.

In Church, you have been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of God. The Spirit has been given to you, and God preaches these things and you, in the Spirit, know what God says. The words of Jesus to you are the words of the Savior and you have “ears to hear.” Having ears to hear, then, you listen carefully and take seriously these warnings. You realize too and understand that you need to be a hearer of the word. You know when you look at yourself apart from Christ you see bad soil. You see your life and the dangers you walk in all the way as the devil is wanting to devour you any way he can. You know the temptation to view your Christian faith not lived-in view of and under the cross of suffering, persecution, and a daily dying to sin and rising to new life. God calls you to recognize the danger that comes with times of joy in so far as you can become complacent and then when the times of trial do come, and they will, that you simply retreat away from hearing the word of God and living lives according to you. And yes, you are admonished to a faith that doesn't simply sit and let the word of God go in one ear and out the other but take it to heart and do what God commands you as you have been given a new life in Christ as Jesus himself said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it.”

Learn from this parable about your life in Christ and seek the things of God as the baptized who heed the warnings of Jesus and listen to his instruction. Listen again to that last group Jesus spoke about, “As for that in the good soil, they

are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.” That’s what your life in Christ is to look like. Did you catch there too how very different it is from the previous groups Jesus mentions? Jesus says that they “hold it fast in an honest and good heart.” An honest and good heart is one that acknowledges and confesses his sin, he’s honest about who he is before God. He knows his goodness comes only from the one who alone is good and perfect, Jesus, and God has created in him a clean heart and renewed a right spirit within him.

This good soil too bears fruit with patience. Bearing fruit comes from the faith that is fed, nurtured and cultivated by God who has given this faith through his word. It lives and grows as it continues to hear God’s word and receive his sacraments because it knows this is where salvation is given and looks to the Sower of the seed, Christ, as Matthew’s Gospel account of this tells us, for his very life. All of this is done in patience, a fruit of the Spirit, which suffers, endures, and is steadfast knowing that your labor is not in vain and there is a future glory to come beyond compare. These fruits then show forth a living active faith as he goes home and talks about the word he has heard with his wife, his kids, his friends and neighbors. It’s a living and active life. Luther in his Lectures on Genesis writes, “Now, when the Word is shining forth, we do more good in one hour than we did during the entire time of our life in cloisters. For it is the Word of God alone that makes learned, ready, and courageous men—men who without any strenuous effort accomplish many things in an admirable manner, while the ungodly, on the other hand, deliberate a long time and yet do nothing right.”

The good soil doesn’t just hear the word and forget it but soaks it up as a parched ground savoring every drop of water to quench it. It confesses this word in his words and actions. He bears fruit because God produces this in his life and the mercy of God spills over into the lives of others. God’s cup overflows as the Christian forgives and confesses the faith. This is all what Jesus is teaching you today. So “he who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Look at your life and see what describes you. Are you one of the ones being attacked by the devil as he is trying to take God’s word from you and letting him do this? Are you one that has heard God’s word and now things in your life have happened that make you want to question it because it’s hard to hear about you or your loved one? Has Christ become old news to you? Have you gone through times of trial and suffering so that now you think you are entitled to tell God how things are going to be? Is this what the Christian life is as God’s word teaches then would you rather seek something that will make your happier and let you live as you want? Are you holding fast to it in an honest and good heart? Think carefully about this and examine your life. God calls you to see that in all these things in one way or another you haven’t been faithful to God’s word, you have sinned against Christ and his Scriptures. This word of God today cuts through your excuses, rationales, arrogance, and whatever else. It pierces through you exposing your sin and then, says something to you, “repent.”

Dear saints of God, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Christ is the word of God incarnate who came down to this world in order that he would give up his life for you to have life. He, the seed of the woman promised in Genesis 3:15, is the one who has done this for you. Jesus said in John 12, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” He has died and is risen and you are given the fruit of his labors. You have this now and the Lord showers it up you in this place. He is good and his word to you is one of comfort and peace. The Sower is here and he scatters out this seed that “your sin is forgiven dear child of God.”

Hearing this word in your God given faith, then, have no fear. Rejoice God shows you mercy in Christ and he speaks to you. Know this full well that your Lord has accomplished your salvation and you have no doubt that he has done it for you and that it is yours. It’s yours, it really is. Nothing else is needed and even in those times in your life when you may be sitting here and wondering what the point is or maybe even beginning to wonder off in your thoughts the Lord is still

here with healing, consolation, and peace. He speaks his word to you and has given you his Holy Scriptures so that you would be saved eternally and so you are his own.

God's word is all sufficient and makes this divinely sure to you as you go through this world. He does what he says in his word and he is the actor, the one doing the work in your life. The Holy Spirit is alive and active as you gather here and go from this place even as he has called you by the Gospel, gathered you into the church, enlightened you with God's wisdom, and sanctified you as a new man in Christ. All this has been done for you and you have the fruits of this in your life that sprout and bear abundant fruit. This is God's living and active word for you and those are adjectives to rejoice in because it means you have certainty knowing God is at work. What a joy to hear all of this day and to know that God's care for you is true, faithful, and all sufficient. He never leaves you lacking when it comes to the things of your salvation. Have confidence and trust God's word which tells you that if God is for you in Christ then who can be against you? With that faith you stand up against sin, death, and the devil and have the victory of one who knows the Sower and is a laborer in his vineyard.

There's a rest in all this too. The Sabbath rest, in the Epistle reading, belongs to you as a baptized child of God as you receive the means of grace from the Lord of the Sabbath and look forward to that eternal Sabbath of life everlasting. God is showering this all upon you freely and fully. Hear his word and cling to it in a steadfast faith worked and sustained by God alone. Rejoice in what your Lord has done and know it all belongs to you. "For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." That's yours now and your future just as God's word promises.

Dear saints of God finally and most importantly take comfort in all of this before you this morning in the one who is the Sower of the seed, Jesus, and look to him alone today. Cling to him because he is the one who didn't fall to the temptations of the devil. He is the one who is the very Word of God made flesh who was never complacent but set his face like flint toward Jerusalem and was faithful during times of trial, and great suffering. He is the one who has done it, it is finished, and it's all for you. Hear as you have been given ears to hear and see Jesus crucified for you and risen proclaiming to you that you are forgiven and have eternal life. Baptized into Christ, this is all yours. Hear his word knowing that the secrets of the Kingdom of God are yours. Feast at his Supper and find refreshment for your souls as your sin is forgiven and you have life and salvation. Rest and rejoice in Jesus who is Lord of the Sabbath and sows the seed of the word in your life and he accomplishes what he sends it to do; and he has. You are redeemed by the blood of Christ. You have eternal life. You have ears to hear. Hear this now and forever.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.