

Sexagesima Sunday | St. Luke 8:4-15  
February 19, 2017 | Saude & Jerico Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

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Lord of the harvest, You sow good seed into the hearts of people everywhere: Grant that our hearts may not be so hardened by the world's traffic that the seed can take no root; nor so shallow that the roots can find no depth; nor so cumbered with the cares and riches of the world that the growing shoots are choked; but that we by Your gracious working through the Spirit may be good ground, bearing good fruit; to the glory of Your name. Amen. (*Parish Prayers*, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 52)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for this morning is taken from the eighth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to [Jesus], 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." / And when His disciples asked Him what this parable meant, He said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.' / "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. 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." (ESV)

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who declares the Word of God's love to the world of sinners, dear fellow redeemed:

One of the fun milestones in the growth of children is when they start to recognize specific parts of the face. You ask where the mouth is, and they point both to yours and theirs. Then the ear, and the nose, and the eye, and the chin. The game can go on for a very long time. They can identify these parts, but they do not understand what they do. They cannot make the connection that the eye sees, the mouth speaks, the nose smells, and the ear hears. This comes later.

The part of the body that concerns us most today is the ear. Jesus said, *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”* So the first requirement for benefiting from Jesus’ words is to have ears. If you haven’t got these, then you have no idea what I am saying right now. You could see my mouth moving, and maybe you could read my lips, but much of the message would be misunderstood. Thankfully, all of you here today have ears, through which you can hear.

## I

You *can* hear the words I speak, but *will* you? That is the next part of what Jesus said, *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”* It is possible to have ears but have absolutely no interest in hearing. This is often how it is when two people on opposite ends of the political spectrum argue with each other. They are not really hearing what the other person is saying. This can happen with any sort of argument, whether between spouses, siblings, co-workers, or acquaintances.

The Word of God likewise is not always welcomed. It is pleasant enough to hear how much God loves us. But it is not so pleasant to hear that we are sinners, and to be challenged when what we say we believe does not match how we live. At certain moments in our lives, every one of us has plugged our ears to God’s law. We push back against its convicting words and the accompanying guilty conscience by pointing out how much worse other people are than we. Why doesn’t God just focus on them for awhile? Or we tell ourselves that we have earned the right to some bad behavior after all the years of good we have accumulated. We show that we have unhearing ears whenever we deflect the blame for our sins onto others, or when we willfully do what God says we should not.

Hearing God’s Word means taking to heart everything that God speaks. There is no hearing without humility. Only a proud person refuses to listen. We have nothing to be proud about as we stand before God. We have no leverage to get ourselves out of sin. When the Lord speaks His law, that is the time for our mouths to close and our ears to open. The Apostle Paul writes, *“Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God”* (Rom. 3:19). The law holds us accountable for our wrongdoing. It is not easy to listen to. It is humbling. We feel shame. But our ears must be open to God’s law. If they are not, they will remain closed to the Gospel too.

This is sadly the status of many in our day. They do not want to hear God’s Word. Paul said that these *“people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths”* (1Tim. 4:3-4). What are some of these myths that our society has wandered after? For one, the myth that God loves you just the way you are, so you can keep living in your sin and still be right with Him. Another myth is that it doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you feel God’s presence in your life. Still another myth is that you don’t need to regularly hear God’s Word and receive the Sacraments to remain a Christian. Those are faith-destroying myths. They do not come from the Bible, but from sinful desires and sinful thinking.

How can these myths be exposed? Paul wrote in his letter to Timothy, a pastor in Ephesus, *“preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching”* (v. 2). It is the Word and the Word alone, that can break through the crust of the unhearing ear and cause faith to grow. And Jesus spreads out His Word generously. He wants everyone to hear it and be saved.

But in many places, the Word falls on deaf ears. According to Jesus' parable, of all the places the seed of the Word was sown, only the seed in the good soil produced fruit. Just one quarter of the ground where the seed fell was fit for sustained growth. The seed that fell on the path was eaten by the birds. The seed that fell on the rocks grew up but wilted. The seed that fell among the thorns was choked. This shows us that the Word is opposed almost everywhere it is sown. Jesus said that the devil is the one that devours the seed from the hard path. He said that the plants growing on the rocks are the people who believe for a time but wilt under the heat of persecution and trouble. The plants among the thorns are the people whose faith is slowly choked by "*the cares and riches and pleasures of life*" until it is destroyed.

As much as we would like to say that the final category – the good soil – is where we fit in, that has not always been the case. Whenever you have willfully done what you know is wrong, you were following not God and His Word, but the devil. In those times, you let the devil take the precious Word away from you. Other times, you felt like your faith was strong, but at the first sign of trouble – health problems, challenges to your beliefs, hardships – you immediately doubted God. Whenever your heart has been filled with desire for the bright and shiny things of the world rather than the eternal riches of God, you were caught among the choking thorns. We have not always been rooted in the good soil producing all kinds of good fruit.

## II

But no matter where you have been and what you have done contrary to God's will, He has led you once again to this place, to hear His holy Word, to have this good seed broadcast to you. We do not truly grasp what a gift this is, that the Lord should speak His Word of grace to us. When the disciples asked Jesus about the meaning of His parable, He said, "*To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'*" It was not just the twelve disciples who were blessed "*to know the secrets of the kingdom of God.*" You are blessed in exactly the same way. You are hearing today the same explanation Jesus shared with His disciples. He reveals His sacred secrets to you. The Lord has not hid His mercy from you so that you might see but not see, hear but not understand. His message is for you, for your ears. You need to hear it.

You need to hear it because "*faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*" (Rom. 10:17). If you do not hear the word of Christ and hear it often, you will not have faith. These two things are inseparably connected with each other: God's Word and your faith. Both of them are gifts from God. When He scatters the seed of the Gospel, it produces faith in the hearts of sinners and strengthens faith. It is not up to you to make sure you are good soil for the Word. No amount of your own plowing and digging and preparation can accomplish this. The Word does the work. The Word of God's law first breaks through the hard, stony soil of your heart, so that it is ready for the Gospel to take root.

When you have heard the law, when you have come to an understanding of your sinfulness, that you haven't always gladly heard God's Word and lived according to it, then the Lord sows His forgiveness there. He forgives you for your willful sinning, for your weak trust in Him, for your preoccupation with the things of the world that do not last. He forgives all of this because of what Jesus did on your behalf. Jesus let Himself be picked at by the devil on the hard path of His suffering and death. He felt the wilting heat of God's anger against sin. He was crowned

with thorns and sent by the cross to the grave. He endured all of this out of love for you. He wants you to hear about this, but not *just* hear it. He wants you to hear and believe that He lived a perfect life, and suffered and died, and rose again for you.

As comforting as this message is, our ears are not always open to it. Our sinful flesh tries to convince us that it is a false hope, it is too good to be true, and that we are better off not hearing it. But it is not false hope; it is true. God the Holy Spirit has been sent for the express purpose of bringing this hope to us, of opening our ears so that we hear and believe. **The Holy Spirit Is Our Hearing Aid.** Without His work through the Word, we would never listen to and believe the Gospel. But because He is working, we can be sure that God's Word will never return to Him empty, but it will accomplish His purpose (Is. 55:11).

His Word is even now accomplishing His purpose for your life by entering your ears and hearts and reassuring you that you have a Savior who loves you, who forgives you, and who will never stop fighting for your soul. *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"*

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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