

Sexagesima Sunday

St. Luke 8:4-15: "See What Has Been Given to You!"

February 3/4, 2018 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

+ + +

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.)

The sermon text for today 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)

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

In Christ Jesus, "the Sun of Righteousness" which rose "with healing in its wings" (Mal. 4:2), dear fellow redeemed:

In the classic movie, *White Christmas*, Bing Crosby shares a bit of advice with a friend. "When I'm worried, and I can't sleep," he croons, "I count my blessings instead of sheep. And I fall asleep counting my blessings." It probably isn't bad advice, but it is no easy thing to count blessings when things are going poorly. What would Job have thought if his friends had tried to comfort him after the loss of everything he had with a, "Cheer up, old boy! Look on the bright

side! Count your blessings!" He would have called them miserable comforters, which they were, but for other reasons.

We *should* count our blessings. Every day we should give thanks for the good things God freely gives us, for the ability to think and work, for our food and clothing, our home and possessions, a God-fearing spouse and children, good friends and neighbors, peace in our land, seasonable weather, and much more. Then there are the spiritual gifts God provides, such as the forgiveness of our sins, the comfort and strength of the Holy Spirit, the protection of the angels, and so on. We have more blessings than we could begin to count.

But we have many troubles too, and the troubles can seem a lot bigger than the blessings. The troubles can seem so overwhelming that we stop seeing the blessings at all. We might even forget the blessings we had in the first place. Or we might just as easily lose sight of the blessings when everything seems to be going well. Then we think that our success is due to our own abilities and effort and has nothing to do with God.

I

The sermon text for today deals with exactly these attitudes. Jesus calls on us to open our eyes and ears to the great blessings of God. To illustrate this, He described a sower casting seed in his field. Not wanting to miss any good ground, he liberally broadcast the seed. Some fell on the hard path where it would not grow, some upon rocks where it could not take root, some among thorns which choked it, and some in good soil where it grew and produced fruit. And He called out to those around Him, "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*"

What did He mean? Wasn't everyone gathered there to listen to Him? Weren't their ears doing what they were supposed to? But Jesus was not simply concerned that people were close enough to hear what He was saying. He wanted them both to hear His words and believe in Him. He wanted them to consider how the things He taught applied to each one of them. He wanted everyone to do what His disciples did, which was to inquire of Him and to look into "*what this parable meant.*"

But many did not do this. Some of them might have been drawn away by other commitments; they had no more time to spend with Jesus. Others might have thought, "We are just simple folk; the theologians and philosophers can figure out these teachings!" Some might have imagined they had nothing more to learn, since they had a godly life pretty well sorted out. But they sure hoped this person and that one were listening!

The excuses haven't changed. People still identify a million reasons why they don't have time to listen to Jesus' Word. Or they cloak laziness in humility and expect others to preserve the truth for them. These have no strong desire to advance in knowledge beyond what they learned as children so many years ago. Or they compare themselves to their ignorant and worldly friends and figure they are in as good a shape as anyone.

Then what happens when tests and temptations come? They might get sick, or lose their job, or lose someone they love. They are faced with questions they don't remember how the Bible answers. They fall into sin and realize they are not all that different from the sinners around them. How are they supposed to deal with those things?

Some decide that God must not love them, or that He does not exist. Or they shape him into a more accommodating god, one that suits them better. These are the ones that let the devil take the Word from their hearts, *“so that they may not believe and be saved.”* Others wonder why the Word does not excite them like it used to, why it has become so difficult to motivate themselves to hear it. *“It must have been a phase,”* they think, *“but it was empty. The Word did not supply what I thought it did.”* And these fall away. Still others grow in the Word for a while, but they take it for granted. They get comfortable going through the motions but not actually engaging head and heart. They care very little about maintaining pure doctrine or living according to the Word. The faith in these is slowly choked and dies.

And how does it stand with you? Do you have ears to hear what Jesus says? Do you desire to grow in His Word and gladly hear and learn it? Do you *“hold it fast in an honest and good heart”*? Do you desire to *“bear fruit with patience”*? Sometimes you do. Sometimes you are that rich soil, in which the Word grows and produces fruit. But sometimes your heart is hard and unwilling to hear the Word, sometimes you haven't let the Word sink deep roots and have the kind of stability and presence in you that it should, and sometimes you have considered your cares, riches, and pleasures to be more important than anything else.

Could it be, then, that you have only thought you were a Christian, but are not one in reality? Are you one that is condemned to *“see but not see,”* and to *“hear but not understand”*? The enemies that would coax us away from the saving Word of God are many, and they are formidable. We do not have the luxury of sometimes letting down our guard or just coasting along. Human history is full of people who trusted God for a time, but then rejected Him and died in unbelief. Some of them grew up the same way you did, had the same spiritual training as you, had every advantage that you have, and they threw it away.

II

But here you are. And the God who created you, who redeemed you, and who sanctifies you – He is here too. He is here with blessings to give you. He has secrets to reveal. You sit here today before Jesus, just as the people did in today's text. And Jesus tells you this parable about a sower sowing his seed. What do you make of it? You don't have to wonder at its meaning. But you do need to pay attention to it and humbly apply it to your life.

Jesus calls out, *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”* And then He picks you out of the crowd and draws you into the inner circle of His disciples. You hear the same words today that they heard so long ago. *“To you,”* He says, *“it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God.”* Don't you want to know those secrets? So many throughout history have wished they could be sitting where you are, and to hear what you hear. And this privilege has been given to you!

These secrets are not revealed to the unrepentant, or to the self-righteous, or to the proud. *“God... gives grace to the humble”* (1Pe. 5:5; Prov. 3:34). The penitent, the lowly, and the humble are those whose hard hearts have been crushed by the law. The Holy Spirit cracks opens their heart like a clam shell to reveal all the wickedness and sin hiding there. It must be cleansed. So Jesus pours in His holy blood to purify it (1Jn. 1:7). Cleansed of sin, the heart is ready to be filled with good things, to have faith grow, and to produce fruits.

It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that the bad ground of the heart becomes good soil receptive to the Word. By your own reason and strength, you cannot make God's Word take root and grow in you. On your own, you can only get in the way. But God is both faithful and powerful. He wants you to hear His Word and believe it. He wants you to hear how Jesus lived perfectly in your place, how He gladly grew in the Word and did not let it get snatched away, scorched, or choked. He wants you to believe that Jesus took your sins—your sins of indifference and unfaithfulness and stubbornness—and paid in full for each one with His holy blood.

These are the secrets that the world neither knows nor cares about. But to you, they are secrets revealed. Peter writes that *"Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look"* (1Pe. 1:10-12).

See What Has Been Given to You! The salvation and grace that prophets longed to see, that angels long to look into, these are yours. You don't have to look for a Savior that will come; the Son of God already became incarnate for you. You don't have to hope that you will be forgiven; Jesus died in your place for your sins. You don't have to worry what your enemies might do to you or what will happen to you when you die; Jesus rose from dead for you and declared His victory yours.

Through the living waters of His Word, the Lord continues to nourish and strengthen your faith in Him. He brings that tender plant to maturity and finally to harvest. When you are gathered in with the heavenly harvest, nothing will block your view of the countless blessings of God. No earthly riches and pleasures will be missed, no sin will be remembered. Then you, God's cherished plant, will bask eternally in the bright, warm light of God's Son.

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.

+ + +