

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

James 1:16-21: "The Implanted Word Keeps Bearing Fruit."

May 9/10, 2020 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

### In Nomine Iesu

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O God, the Father of lights, from whom comes down every good and perfect gift and who are Yourself the only satisfying Portion of the souls which You have made, grant us grace, we humbly ask You, to raise our thoughts and affections from earth to heaven and to desire continually Your presence, that... in the midst of all worldly vanity and change, our hearts may surely there be fixed where alone are to be found true joys and everlasting peace; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 123)

*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 today is taken from the first chapter of the Epistle of St. James. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. / Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

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

In Christ Jesus, the Father's greatest and most perfect Gift, who by His death and His resurrection to life again has brought salvation to our souls, dear fellow redeemed:

It's planting season! Besides the farmers at work in their fields, I'm sure many of you have been at work in your gardens. You prepare the ground and dig in seeds, and before long those seeds sprout up and grow into large, food-bearing plants. You have a part to play in bringing those plants to maturity. You water as needed, and you clear out weeds that would choke them. But ultimately the plants grow on their own, while you watch God's magnificent creation in action.

In Mark 4, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear" (vv. 26-28). Just as God is the one who makes plants grow and brings a crop to maturity, so it is with our faith. When the seed of the Word is planted in someone, God is the one who makes it grow and produce.

This is what we hear about in today's text. James writes about who is working, how He works, and what effect His work has. In the verses before our text, he mentions "the rich" who think that their success is due to their own ability or effort or strength. But their riches cannot save

their souls. They will fade and die like wildflowers do. *“For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes”* (Jam. 1:11). The self-made and the self-reliant fall down as quickly as they rise up.

They do not realize that *“[e]very good gift and every perfect gift is from above.”* We forget that too. Often it takes the loss of our good things before we realize what we had. We don’t appreciate our health and strength as much as when we are sick or injured. We don’t appreciate work until we are out of a job. We don’t appreciate the blessings of home or possessions until they break down. We don’t appreciate family and friends as much as when they are gone.

All of these good gifts are from above, *“coming down from the Father of lights.”* This is a title for “God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth” (Apostles’ Creed). He *“separated the light from the darkness”* (Gen. 1:4) in the beginning and created *“the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night – and the stars”* (v. 16). Just as the sun, moon, and stars keep shining day after day, so the bright beams of God’s love continue to shine upon us as He cares for us.

But as committed as He is to providing our “daily bread,” our heavenly Father especially wants us to have the “bread of heaven.” He wants us to have faith in His Son Jesus, because only faith in Jesus saves. To bring us this faith, the Father sends out the Holy Spirit. Jesus spoke about the Spirit’s work in the Holy Gospel for today: *“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you”* (Joh. 16:13-15).

*“[T]he Spirit of truth”* guides us into “all the truth” through *“the word of truth.”* This is what Jesus asked His Father to do for the disciples: *“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth”* (Joh. 17:17). Our spiritual life depends entirely on God’s Word of truth. His Word not only informs us what He has done for us, but it also imparts His blessings to us. Today’s text says, *“Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth.”* It was God’s choice to bring us forth by His Word. This was not by our will; we did not choose God. Our will could choose nothing but evil; *“we were dead in our trespasses”* (Eph. 2:5).

The Holy Spirit planted faith in our hearts and continues to nourish it and make it grow by the powerful working of His Word. This Word of truth gave us new life as the apostle Peter writes, *“[Y]ou have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God”* (1Pe. 1:23). A plant cannot grow without a seed. It may seem small and insignificant, but a seed contains all the genetic information necessary to grow the plant and produce its fruit. The Word of God may also seem small and insignificant – nothing special. But the seed of the Word is at work in us causing us to grow as fruitful children of God.

Of all God’s creatures, we believers in Jesus are the *“firstfruits.”* We are the beautiful produce of the Lord’s great harvest. The Father *“brought us forth by the word of truth”* because He wanted us to share the victory and glory of His only Son. Jesus was planted in the tomb after His death, and no one expected Him to spring forth alive. But He did on the third day. He rose again from the dead showing that death was defeated for all people. This is why we bury the departed saints with hope and why we plant flowers on their graves. It is because we wholeheartedly

believe that the seed of the body planted in the ground will come forth with great power and glory, never to perish again (1Co. 15:35-44).

The Word that we hear today is preparing us for that day. So we ought to *“be quick to hear”* and *“slow to speak.”* A person’s knowledge does not expand by listening to himself speak, but by listening to others. The same goes for faith. We cannot make faith stronger by our thoughts, words, or wishes. *“[F]aith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”* (Rom. 10:17). A plant must receive to grow – water, sunshine, heat –, and it cannot grow without them. So also we grow by drinking from the living waters of God’s Word and soaking up the light of His grace.

But there are things that stunt our spiritual growth, that cause damage to our faith. A plant suffers when weeds choke it, when bugs attack it, and when its roots do not sink deeply into the ground. One of the things that chokes faith is our anger and bitterness toward one another. We refuse to forgive wrongs done to us, and we feel justified in returning evil for evil, whether toward family members or neighbors. The devil and the world also attack us with temptations toward *“filthiness and rampant wickedness,”* to put our sinful desires before anything else. Our sinful habits and our neglect of the life-giving Word keep the roots of faith from sinking more and more deeply.

We cannot work ourselves out of our sinful state any more than a rich person can buy his way out of death. That is why God must give His good and perfect gifts from above. The best gift He gave was the gift of His only Son. We sang about this in the hymn before the sermon, a hymn written by Martin Luther:

He spoke to His beloved Son:  
“’Tis time to have compassion.  
Then go, bright Jewel of My crown,  
And bring to man salvation.  
From sin and sorrow set him free;  
Slay bitter death for him, that he  
May live with Thee forever.”  
(*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, #378, v. 5)

Jesus let the weeds of our sin choke Him, the devils attack Him, and death strike Him. But none of these things could destroy Him. He destroyed them, so that we could grow up in Him and bear fruit in His name. *“I am the vine; you are the branches,”* He said. *“Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing”* (Joh. 15:5).

We abide in Him by faith in His promises, and we remain in faith by abiding in His Word (Joh. 8:31). So James urges the readers of his epistle to *“receive with meekness the implanted word.”* Many words are planted in us that we remember long after they are spoken. We think especially today about the words of instruction, advice, encouragement, and love from our mothers which still guide us. But even more powerful than that is the implanted Word of God.

It was no mistake that you were brought to faith through the powerful Word. God plants with purpose, and He constantly cultivates and tends what He caused to sprout inside you. He

planted His Word of grace and forgiveness and life deep in your heart. He wants you to know His love for you, and He wants to keep your faith growing.

Like a mature plant, the stronger and healthier faith is, the more fruit it produces. But if faith is not fed by the Word, it will weaken and eventually wither up and die. This is why James urges us to *“receive with meekness the implanted word”* – receive God’s Word of grace gladly and with humble and repentant hearts – because *“the implanted word... is able to save your souls.”*

So we will not be deceived by other “products” that promise to do more for our spiritual life than the words of the Bible. We desire no better or more perfect gift than the life-giving Word of the mighty God, who has surely promised: *“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”* (Isa. 55:10-11).

*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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