

Pentecost 7 7/16/23
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 10A

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.

p. 321: What is the 3rd Commandment?

What does this mean?

“Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”. Those were Jesus words to us in last Sunday’s Gospel. This week, He tells the parable of the seed and sower to teach us that He gives us that promised rest through His Word. Our Sabbath rest is not a day of the week; Jesus is our Sabbath rest, who comes to us through His Word, which is why we “do not despise preaching and [God’s] Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.”

But you remember the Garden of Eden, right? What was the first thing the father of all lies said to Eve? “Did God really say?” (Ge 3:1). Satan does not want you to have faith. He wants desperately to rob you of the rest that Jesus gives. He wants you to doubt God’s Word; he does not want you to trust and believe God’s Word; he does not want you to find contentment in Christ and His Word of promise.

The book of Proverbs says it this way, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding” (3:5). But, we don’t, do we? The problem is not the Word of God. The problem is you. You insist on walking by your own understanding; by what your eyes see; by what your emotions feel.

Jesus says it this way in our parable: Christ the Sower plants the seeds of faith in you. But, the evil one comes and snatches it from you.

You harden your heart so that it does not grow. Troubles and crisis come, and you fall away from gladly hearing and learning Christ's word of rest.

Let's look at a couple of examples from Scripture. Job. You remember our friend Job? He loses his children, and all his wealth, and he is covered with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And his so-called "friends" – I'll just call them complete idiots; I am in church, after all – come with all kinds of worldly, Dr. Phil advice. You know what really troubles us about Job? Just really doesn't sit well with us? It's God – **it's God who puts the target of Job's back**. It's God who allows Satan to afflict Job. And, it's God who uses these afflictions to drive faith into the heart of Job. And that's why Job walks by faith in the words and promises of God; not trusting in what his eyes see, not what the emotions of the moment feel, not what the complete idiots say to him. He knows Christ will rise from the grave to defeat his greatest enemy, death itself. That's why Job confesses, "Though He slay me," – though God allows and permits all of this – **"I will hope in Him"** (13:15).

And let's not forget Jesus. Jesus is baptized, the Father speaks as the Son stands in the water, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17). And immediately, God the Holy Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the father of all lies for 40 days and 40 nights. That's right, God **drives** Jesus – just like Jesus made a whip and "drove" the money-changers from the temple – to be tempted by Satan.

But once again, we see the grace of God at work. Satan puts all manner of lies before the very Son of God to keep Him from the cross. And what does that true man do? He leans not on His own understanding, but trusts in God. He answers the lies of Satan, "It is written...It is written...It is written" (Mt 4). Jesus Himself trusts and hopes in God's Word.

It is good to see the green countryside. But, drought is still in our recent memory, because we know how devastating it. But, My Friends in Christ, there is a drought much, much worse for us than the lack of rain and snow. That is the drought of God's word; when we lean on our own understanding and do not hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

Isaiah tells us that the word of God works like the rain and the snow,

For as the rain and 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 (vv. 10-11).

The Good News of the Gospel is that God sends the rain of His Word that rains down from heaven. The rain fell that night in Bethlehem when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God sent forth His Word to accomplish, to succeed, in your salvation. The rain falls as Jesus goes around healing the sick, raising the dead, making the blind see, and the deaf hear. He goes forth, showering people with God's love. And He goes all to the cross of Calvary, where he rains down God's love upon all people, of all time, and of all places, as He suffers the wages for the sin of all the world. And the word goes forth from His mouth: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). "I thirst" (Jn 19:28). "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Mt 27:46). "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Lk 23:46). "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). It is finished, because the Word of God has accomplished what He came to do.

Jesus died for you and Jesus rose for you. Because He did that, you are showered with God's love. You have the forgiveness of all your sins. Forty days after He rose again, He ascended into heaven. The Word of

God returned to God. But, He did not return empty. He returned in victory, in glory.

And, He gives you that victory, He makes that victory your very own, through His Word. Crisis, troubles, trials come to us in this valley of the shadow of death. But, God works good, good for you in all things, Dear Child of God (cf. Ro 8:28). Those crises, troubles, and trials are good for us – because teach us not to lean on our own understanding, but they **drive** us to the Word of God.

You wonder who you are. But, God made you His own child in Baptism and He assures you, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine” (Is 43:1).

You wonder: Does my life matter? Where is the meaning and purpose in my life? God says: “I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Je 29:11).

You feel alone? Christ says, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).

Are you frightened, anxious? God answers, “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Ps 27:1).

You feel embarrassed, weighed down by the shame of your sin. Jesus says, “Take, eat; this is My body...Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:26-27).

“As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty” (v. 23). **God's Word**

does not return empty. It produces within you, in your heart and your life, a beautiful crop of faith, and love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Even in your lives today, you see that God's word does not return to Him empty, but it succeeds -- it succeeds in you.

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