

A Word Creating Life

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, Proper 10[a]

July 16, 2017

ISAIAH 55:10-13

¹⁰ **“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,**
¹¹ **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.** ¹² 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. ¹³ 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.”

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

God sends forth his Word, and his Word accomplishes all he intends.

He sends his Word forth into our lives, into our families, and his Word, never empty, accomplishes that for which he sends it.

What God intends for his Word is for his Word to be proclaimed in the Church, gathering many sinners to his Name; for his Word to be spoken among Christians to one another, reconciling them to one another, binding them together in the unity of his Body, the Church; for his Word to be taught to children and in families, that families would have the joy of knowing that they are at peace and the Lord is dwelling with them in his Word; for his Word to come to your ears and mine, cleansing us of sin and creating in us the heart of faith.

God sends forth his Word to forgive sinners, to chase away fear and guilt, to cover shame, to encourage and comfort; he sends forth his Word to bestow life. Into a dying world—a world fearful of tomorrow, a world run by power and intimidation and shame, of sickness and division, a world under the powers and principalities of the devil—into this world, the Lord speaks his Word, and his Word, never empty, is living and life-giving, creating life where and when God intends.

But we don't see this. We can't see it. What the Word does is known not by sight, but by faith. And faith lives not by what is seen with the eye, but by what is bestowed by the Word.

So God's Word is different than what we see. It is actually opposed to what we see. Our eyes see a sinner struggling with temptation; God's Word says, *This one is mine, I put my Name on him in Baptism; I will do depart my Name, I will not depart him.*

Our eyes see a person hurt by sin—by their own sin, by sin done against them by someone else; but God's Word says, *This One is clean, I give her my Own Name, she lives in my honor, she belongs not to the sin done to her, but to me.*

Our eyes see sin and the effects of sin and the division and death around us; but God's Word says, *I make all things new, I keep my sheep and lose not one of them, I am the God not of the dead but of the living, and all who hear my Word are living.*

In our life of sinful flesh, we see sin—our own sin, the world's sin. In our life of faith, though, we hear only God's Word which justifies the sinner and bestows life.

While our eyes see sin; our ears hear God's Word. It is his Word forgiving sin and creating life where eyes see only sin and death.

But this aggravates us. The Word of God is living and active, creating life, bestowing grace, but we want to see it.

So our Lord gives a parable to show his Word bringing forth life.

A sower sows some seed. The seed in the parable is the Word of God. Some seed was sown beside the

road, the birds came and ate, so that seed brought forth no life.

Some fell into the rocks. It sprang up, it looked good, until the sun scorched it, it wilted; it brought forth no life.

Some went into the thorns, was choked out, it brought forth no life.

And some fell into good soil, it grew up into a strong crop; from this seed, nothing but new life, even multiplying beyond understanding.

Then, following the parable, Jesus gives the kicker: "He who has ears, let him hear." [Matthew 13:9]

So how does the parable hit us? From our standing here on Earth, from the plane of our existence, as we see the world around us and as we perceive sin and the effects of sin, from the angle of our fleshly eyes, how does this parable hit us?

From our angle, it hits us as Law. It convicts us; it convicts those around us and everyone in the world.

This is harsh Law.

Does someone hear the Gospel, but lose the Gospel as Satan and the world's wisdom steal it? That's the roadside dirt, unable to receive the Gospel. He stands under condemnation.

Do you hear the Gospel, and believe it, but when struck with guilt for your sin, with shame brought to you by sin in the world, you doubt that the pure Gospel of grace is for you? For, if the Gospel were for you, you surely would not be struggling with these doubts. Then you have no depth of faith, you are the rocky ground, you are under condemnation.

You hear the Gospel, but you get taken away by the busy-ness and cares of this world? Then you are the

thorns, you are under condemnation.

Then: some seed fell on good, fertile ground, it sprang up and brought forth life. But how is this good news? For who among us can make themselves to be good ground? Can roadside packed dirt turn itself into soft, plowed ground? Can rocks be done with their solidity, and become soft, fertile dirt? Can weeds and thorns rid themselves of weeds and thorns, and become clean fields?

The worst news of all: the only ground to receive the seed is good, fertile ground. This news kills us. For, as sinners, none of us are fertile ground, and we have no hope of ever making ourselves to be so.

Which is the parable's point. You can't do it. You can't see how to do it with your eyes, for your eyes don't see God's Word, but see only this sinful world.

How, then, will we ever have faith?

That's when Jesus pulls us back from seeing things with our eyes, from being locked onto the way we try to salvage things in our sinful world, and he turns us, finally, to nothing but the Word. Not what you see with eyes of flesh, but what you hear with ears of faith.

He who has ears, said Jesus, let him hear. Faith comes by hearing. And hearing comes by the Word of Christ. [Romans 10:17]

So Jesus, knowing that hard ground, and rocky ground, and thorny ground, cannot make itself to the good ground of faith, the ground bringing forth life, but, at the same time, loving the sinner and wanting the sinner to have faith in him, Jesus creates good ground where before there was hard, fertile where before there was rocky, life-producing where before it was nothing but thorns.

Jesus creates you and me to be good ground. And he does it by speaking a Word into our ears—*he who ears to hear, let him hear.*

The Word creates life. The Word of Jesus is not only the factual content of his historical life, is not only

the true proclamation of his grace and love toward you, but it is the Word of promise which is actually creating in you that faith which receives it.

Do you feel like roadside ground, where the Gospel no longer grows? Then don't try to be good ground. That would be your own works, and that's the opposite of faith.

Do you feel like roadside dirt? Then hear the Word of Jesus. His Word creates the good ground; it bestows what it says; it brings forth life.

Do you feel like the rocky ground? Then don't try to be good ground. Rocks can't turn themselves into fertile soil; sinners can't turn themselves holy. Hear the Word of Jesus. It creates the ground which brings forth life, it creates in you a clean heart; it doesn't just promise you life at some date in the far future, but it creates you anew as one who belongs to life, living in the faith that hears the Gospel.

Do you feel like the thorny ground? Thorns can't make themselves to be not-thorns, you can't make yourself to be strong in the faith. Faith doesn't live by works. It lives by the Word of Christ. Hear the Word he speaks into your ears, the Word cleansing you of all sin, forgiving you of all your doubt, speaking life to you wherever you are afraid of death, his Word of grace releasing you from all debt.

Jesus speaks his Word. It bestows what it says. It creates what it promises. It breathes into you a heart of faith.

He sends his Word forth from his mouth, he has it preached in the Church, taught in his families, spoken among his people; his Word does not return to him empty, but it accomplishes that for which he sends it forth. It makes you his own.

Your life, your justification, your salvation, it is all, from beginning to end, accomplished and bestowed by him in his Word.

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