

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH)

Sexagesima – February 20, 2022

Luke 8:4-15 – The Seed is the Word of God

By Vicar Peter Wagner

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The text for today's sermon is from the Gospel, from Luke chapter 8, the Parable of the Sower. We hear again, **"As [Jesus] 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.""** This is our text.

In his teaching Jesus often proclaimed, **"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."** But in today's text he added that the purpose of his parable was so that, **"seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand."** That sounds cruel. Why conceal the gospel? Didn't God say he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but he wants all to turn and live?<sup>1</sup> So if Jesus loves his people, why did he tell parables so they would hear without understanding, without believing and being saved?

Jesus was not cruel to use parables, because his parables are not overly complicated or unattainably lofty. If their meaning is hidden, it's hidden in plain sight. The Parable of the Sower is obviously some sort of warning not to fall away from faith. Just as the glory of God's Son was hidden in plain sight in the humanity of Jesus, God hides the glory of his word in plain sight through parables so anyone can understand by faith.

God does not seek to close anyone's ears. Men close their own ears and cut themselves off. In his love and patience God repeatedly sent judges and prophets to call Israel to repentance. Yet there does come a time when he confirms unbelievers in their unbelief. Like Pharaoh who hardened his own heart five times before God himself hardened his heart, after centuries of plugging their own ears, God finally confirmed Israel in unbelief, allowing them to go on hearing without understanding.

So Jesus quoted God's words to Isaiah, **"Go, and say to this people: Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."**<sup>2</sup> These words sound harsh, but they actually express God's deep sorrow over his people's unbelief. Isaiah would be rejected because the people had already rejected God. Isaiah's mission was futile, but it was for our benefit, that we might learn from Israel's unbelief and open our hearts in faith.

As an example of hardened hearts and plugged ears, consider that this past week was declared Sex Week on the Ohio State campus. The event celebrated abortion, promiscuity, homosexuality, and transgenderism, embracing many perverse subjects not to be named among saints. But when God condemns such sexual immorality in the Bible, he does it because he loves all sinners. He wants us to repent and be forgiven by grace for Jesus' sake. Yet the world plugs its ears against these loving words. Hearing, they do not understand. They call God's good Law evil, bigoted, and hateful.

So the greatest tragedy in God's sight is when the world he loves rejects his warnings of the Law, because then they cannot repent and believe the Gospel. Jesus grieved over unbelief, he said, **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"**<sup>3</sup>

So let this be a warning to us. Don't reject God's word, don't stop your ears. Pay attention to the warnings of the Law, confronting your sin. Listen and believe the good news of forgiveness. We're all in danger of hearing God's word without understanding, in danger of hardening our hearts and missing the Gospel hidden in plain

<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 33:11

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 6:9-10

<sup>3</sup> Luke 13:34

sight. As we listen to sermons, our minds tend to drift elsewhere. We latch onto distractions, we don't let his word take root. So today, lest we hear without understanding, lest we talk about listening without actually doing it, let's go back and hear Jesus' words to us in the Parable of the Sower.

**“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. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”**

Unlike most of his parables, Jesus explained to us exactly what this parable means. His disciples wrote down the explanation, so that by God's grace we might understand, repent, and be healed. So pay attention to the explanation and receive it by faith. Jesus said, **“The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard.”** If you remember anything today, remember that the seed is the word of God. You are not the seed. Instead, your hearts are the soil that receives God's word. So this parable asks: How will you receive the seed, the word of God? Is your heart packed hard, trampled and numbed by exposure to worldly perversion? Can Satan easily snatch God's word away from you like the birds of the air? Can distractions and cares of this world choke it out? If you're honest, you know how frail you are. Your heart might be receptive good soil one moment, but rocky the next. Thistles spring up in us all the time, because we cling to the Old Adam of our flesh.

So God's word is the seed, and you are the soil. But who is the Sower? Jesus, of course. He liberally spreads God's word everywhere, not only on the good soil, but also on the pathway, the rocky ground, and the thorny ground, so all of us might hear. And all who preach the word of Christ faithfully are also his sowers. Pastors are sent to sow God's word in their public vocation. This is for good order, that God's word may be clearly and accurately proclaimed in public, so there's no confusion of doctrine.

All Christians are also God's sowers in their vocations. You are to proclaim God's word within the station of life God has put you in. At home, with your friends and coworkers, you are not to remain silent. Fathers and husbands, preach God's word in your home. Mothers, sow it in your children. Students, sow it among your friends and classmates. Employees, teach your coworkers. You must all be ready to give anyone a reason for the hope that is in you.<sup>4</sup>

And when you speak God's word in your vocation, cast the seed indiscriminately. Don't hold back, cast it everywhere, because Jesus has already cast his seed to you. Cast it everywhere, since you don't know what kind of soil is in men's hearts. Let the seed do its work. It's not your seed, but God's. You're merely an agent, his mouthpiece. You can't create the seed or make it sprout. As Isaiah 55 says, it's he who gives bread to the eater and seed to the sower. He sends the rain and the snow from heaven to water it and make it grow.<sup>5</sup> The word you speak goes out from God's mouth, and it shall not return empty, but it shall accomplish that which he purposes.<sup>6</sup>

In response to the appalling message of Sex Week, I taught the OSU students a Bible study rejecting sexual immorality and upholding God's purpose for marriage, that husbands and wives should reflect the self-sacrificing love of Christ for his church. But that wasn't enough. Something needed to be said publicly. Since Pastor Hromowyk and I are appointed by God to publicly cast his seed, we spent much of Wednesday with our families tabling at the student union, explaining what the Bible says about sex. We didn't expect many students to stop and listen, and few did. Those who disagreed ignored us. Those who talked with us were Christians sincerely interested in the Bible. We also realized that many students weren't even aware of the existence of Sex Week. In hindsight, we wished our sign had asked what the Bible says about love rather than sex, in order to get to the gospel more directly for those who needed to hear it. We learned our lesson not to interfere with God's seed, but let it do its own work.

But here's the good news, news that encourages all of us when the world rejects God's seed, news that

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter 3:15

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 55:10

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 55:11

encourages us when we fail to sow his word as we ought. The good news is that our most important vocation is not to be sowers, but hearers of God's word. Jesus is the only true Sower. And he does so much more than plant. He doesn't just cast the seed and walk away. He knows your hard, stony, thorny hearts, because he's also the landowner of the whole farm. Through Baptism, he's claimed you as a patch of soil in his kingdom, his vineyard. Ezekiel 36, God says, **"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you."** That's the purification of baptism. **"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God."**<sup>7</sup>

God does it all. In Baptism, he claimed you as a patch of soil that he will now tend and improve. He committed to digging up your stony hearts and giving you soft, receptive hearts of flesh – good soil that hears his word, holds it fast in an honest and good heart, and bears fruit with patience. He purchased your heart with the blood of Jesus. And since he paid such a costly price for you, since he wants his whole vineyard to be profitable and bear fruit, he will work tirelessly to improve your soil your whole life long.

Your heart naturally rejects his word. But his seed is very good. He keeps replanting it no matter how many times you reject it. He keeps feeding you week after week with the word. He sows indiscriminately and tirelessly. He says about you, **"Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle."**<sup>8</sup> He gives you ears to listen. He draws you from the world that makes your hearts hard and numb. He removes the thorns of cares and pleasures of life by calling you into the church, away from your worldly friends and peers. Here he surrounds you with godly people who love his word, who set a good example.

Jesus will dig up the hard path of your heart and convert it to good soil. He'll remove your rocks so you can absorb the nourishing moisture of his baptismal water, so you can be refreshed with the forgiveness of sins, so his seed can put down deep roots which none can pluck away. The roots of your thorns may be deep too, but Jesus won't stop plucking till they're gone. Then his word will sprout in you, spring up, and produce a healthy crop of good seed. From the soil of your hearts, Jesus promises to produce abundant harvest. He'll speak his word through you, putting his gracious words on your lips, so your preaching in your vocation is never in vain. And through you he'll obtain fruit a hundredfold.

One last point. Jesus said fruit is borne with patience. But that isn't primarily your patience. It's his patience with you. Second Peter 3:9, **"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."**<sup>9</sup> Which brings us back to why Jesus told parables, why he warned about hearing without understanding. He spoke that way to make you examine yourself, to ask if you've plugged your own ears. But he also wants to reassure you that he is patient, that he's claimed you through baptism, that he'll never stop calling you. In his great patience he'll keep tending and nourishing you till you bear abundant fruit. Praise Jesus for sowing his wonderful seed! Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Ezekiel 36:25-28

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 55:13

<sup>9</sup> 2 Peter 3:9