

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 | The Sower**July 12, 2020**

Isaiah 55:10-13, Psalm 65: [1-8] 9-13, Romans 8:1-11, Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

INTRO

Well, once again thank you for tuning in to this message. Today is the 6th Sunday after Pentecost, and as always, if you haven't yet read the Scripture lessons assigned for today, I'd encourage you to pause this recording and to read them before resuming.

The OT lesson is Isaiah 55:10-13 — it's an encouraging passage in which God promises that his word goes out to all the world & accomplishes exactly what he wants of it, like rain that waters the earth, making the land abundant & fruitful.

Then the Psalm today is Psalm 65:9-13 (or 65:1-13 if you'd like), and the Psalm reads a bit like an echo of the Isaiah passage, richly describing the abundance of the land due to God's blessing & again, the rain that he sends:

“You visit the earth and water it;

you greatly enrich it...

You crown the year with your bounty;

your wagon tracks overflow with abundance.” — Psalm 65:9, 11

Well, I like abundance & greenery as much as the next person, but we've had so much rain this last month, I'm about ready for some heat. I start my summer holidays next week & I'm looking for some sunshine in the forecast!

I read this week that actor & comedian Jim Carrey has published his memoirs which came out this week, called *Memoirs and Misinformation*. In the book he tells the story of the time he was told he had 10 minutes to live:

“It’s a part of me. It’s a part of this book...When all is lost, then all is found.” — (<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/q/when-jim-carrey-was-told-he-had-10-minutes-to-live-this-is-what-he-did-1.5640680>, accessed July 8, 2020)

You might remember that in 2018 there was a mistaken emergency alert in the State of Hawaii of an incoming ballistic missile attack. People were abandoning their cars on the highway — it was chaos. In a recent interview about his book, Jim Carrey explains that he was in Hawaii at the time:

“My assistant, Linda, called me and said, ‘Chief, we have 10 minutes,’ and I said, ‘What do you mean?’ And she said, ‘The missiles are coming.’”

What would you do if you were told you had 10 minutes to live?

“After initially trying to reach his daughter from Maui, Carrey walked outside, sat on the [patio] and spent eight minutes going through a ‘gratitude list.’ Staggered by the bounty of his life, he reached a state of grace, closed his eyes, and waited for the missiles.”

And the interview continues:

“‘Now, I walk around the world knowing what that is for me, and if that should happen, where my head’s going to be,’ Carrey says haltingly, wiping away tears. ‘I’ll sit and thank God for the blessings in my life.’” — <https://mbird.com/2020/07/another-week-ends-jim->

[carreys-revelation-covid-judgment-a-new-pz-interview-political-idolatry-the-curved-authenticity-of-rachel-hollis-and-the-great-awakening-in-fiction/](#), accessed, July 9, 2020.

We seem to always have lots to complain about — sometimes I wonder if complaining is our default method of making small talk with people — but we've got lots to be grateful for too. "You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with abundance" the Psalmist says (Psalm 65:11).

Well, then our NT lesson is Romans 8:1-11, a great passage of Paul's, in which he describes the freedom that we have as God's people from judgment & condemnation. The very same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells within us & will raise us too to eternal life — it's an incredible promise.

And then our Gospel lesson today is Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23. This is the parable of the sower, and if you've been around the church for any length of time you will be familiar with this story — of the seed that falls on different types of soil, some of which can't support the growing seed, others of which can.

THE PARADOX

Now, in these lessons we have a paradox — maybe you've noticed it. There are different, seemingly contradictory assertions being made. In the OT lesson from Isaiah we are told that God's Word is powerful. It goes forth from his mouth & accomplishes the purposes for which he sent it.

And this is true — we know of the power of words. Words have the ability to build us up, or to tear us down. Think of your high-school basketball coach, or your piano teacher growing up, think of your parents, or your aunts & uncles, of the words of your peers, or the things said by

your boss. We've all had people in our lives who have believed in us, supported us, encouraged us, and others for whom we seemed to be a nuisance & a problem — and their words have cut us. Words — whatever it is that people have said to us, repeated often enough, lead us to begin to believe them — those words hold a power over us.

Words are powerful, and God's words are even more powerful. In the story of creation we read that God speaks the universe into being — God's words are not only powerful, but they have creative agency — they can bring into being that which did not exist before. And our Isaiah text is a wonderful promise that God's Word continues to go forth into the world & it does stuff, it creates & shapes — it brings about faith. As Paul says in Romans:

“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” —Romans 10:17

God's Word is powerful.

RESISTANCE TO GOD'S WORD

And yet, even though God's Word is all-powerful and accomplishes what God sends it out to do, here in our Gospel lesson Jesus tells a story in which God's word goes forth but is sometimes resisted, or hindered. Jesus is preaching a sermon on the side of the lake. Like Otis Redding sings, he's “Sittin' on the dock of the bay, watchin' the tide, roll away” when a crowd starts to gather around him. So he gets out into a boat and uses the boat as his pulpit. I've always enjoyed the outdoors, and just like the fact that food always tastes better outside, there's something about ministry that's done in the outdoors too — camp ministry, in which so many of the distractions of ordinary life are stripped away & we can hear God speak to us clearly — there's nothing like it.

We had some seeds that we've kept from previous years & this spring we planted some poppy seeds in a barrel in our backyard. They sprouted, and they grew, and they grew taller, and taller. After a while I thought, "These doesn't look quite like poppies to me!" And then they sprouted little yellow flowers. We had been growing canola without even realizing it — we've got a barrel full! Maybe we'll harvest the seeds & next year we can plant our whole back yard & start building up a cash crop... until Monsanto finds out I've been growing some of their seeds, & then I'll be in trouble...

Anyway, Jesus is out on the side of the lake preaching & telling stories, including the story of a farmer sowing seeds. And he's planting seeds everywhere — he is indiscriminate. Seeds are landing in the good furrows, in the packed, dry earth, in the weeds, in the thorns, in barrels in people's backyards — he doesn't care — seeds everywhere! And one by one, the seeds are choked out, they dry out, or are carried away by the birds. In the end only a fraction of the seed produces anything.

Yes, God's Word is powerful & accomplishes its work, but there are also things in this world that hinders God's Word from taking root & growing in people's hearts. We all know this to be true. We've watched this happen in the lives of others, & we also know that this happens in our own hearts too.

HEARING

Our hearts aren't always tilled up well to hear God speaking or to receive it. What are the birds that snatch God's promises from us? What are the thorns that choke out the faith in our hearts? In what ways are our hearts rocky soil, in which faith springs up, only to wither & die as soon as something else comes along to grab our attention, or troubles discourage us?

In each case, Jesus says that people hear God’s word — we don’t need hearing aids (and that might be good news to some of us!) Hearing isn’t the problem, but listening, receiving, embracing the truth of what God is saying to us that is the challenge.

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” —James 1:22

We can spend a lifetime in church hearing God’s Word every week, but putting it into practice & trusting it is another matter altogether.

There are a variety of ways that we can turn our hearts to embrace God’s Word. We can spend time in personal devotions each day, reading God’s word, reflecting & meditating on it. We can spend time each day in prayer. We can have intentional spiritual conversations with other believers to encourage one another & to grow together in faith, being honest with one about the weeds that choke out our faith. We can take focused steps into action, living out what we are reading about in God’s word. His word really is powerful, and as the seeds take root in the ground of our hearts they will germinate & grow, & they will change things — they will bear fruit in us!

“We cannot control the resistance of people to God’s Word, but we can trust in God’s power and promise to work through His Word.” —David Schmitt, <https://www.1517.org/articles/gospel-matthew-131-9-18-23-pentecost-6-series-a>, accessed July 7, 2020.

GOSPEL

What I love most of all about this parable is how it shows God sowing his Word indiscriminately & liberally — generously, over good earth and poor earth — he’s not the best farmer perhaps... The sower sows indiscriminately, so that no matter who you are or what you’ve done, or what your background is, his Word is being spoken to you — his promises are being made to you.

And yes, there are obstacles that prevent the seed from growing, but still, where it does take root it produces a yield of 100, 60, or 30 times! If I got that kind of yield with my canola barrel I'd be farming like a pro in no time!

And this is important for us to take to heart: God's Word accomplishes its work in spite of the forces that oppose it, and we can take that to the bank. Whenever we feel like our hearts more closely resemble a packed concrete sidewalk than a farmer's field, God promises that he will see our faith through. Because Jesus is God's Word made flesh who came into our world from heaven to accomplish an important task, and he was opposed to the point of crucifixion & death. But that didn't stop him or hold him back. And because he was raised from the dead victorious over the power of sin, death, and the devil, he promises to raise us to resurrected life too.

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death... If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” —

Romans 8:1-2, 11

If you are in Christ, you are good soil, even though it might feel some days like you're something else. Let go of the distractions, the thorns, the weeds & embrace the Word of Truth — the Word of Jesus. As Jim Carrey said, “When all is lost, all is found.”