

## **Seed to the sower, bread to the eater**

Isaiah 55:10-13

A Sermon for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

The text today from Isaiah tells us how God works and what he's about:

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither 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 forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that for which I purpose and prosper in the thing for which I send it" (Isaiah 55:10-13).

The Lord works through his Word. And what he is about is bringing forth life, life in this world and his kingdom to come.

These verses remind us of John 1:1-3: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made."

And these verses harken back to Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." When he spoke at the beginning, the Lord said: "Let it be; let it come into being." And it did. That's how the world was created. By his Word.

He is the Maker of heaven and earth. He is Lord, and beside him there is no other.

But that's not all. With that comes John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, became one of us. The Word in flesh is still the Word.

The same is true when Jesus healed people who were possessed by demons (Matt 8:16). He rebuked the demons; he cast them out with his Word. Or when there was a storm on the sea, Jesus rebuked the storm (Mark 4:39). Or when Lazarus was in the grave, Jesus said to Lazarus: "Lazarus, come out" (John 11:43). It's the Word, the power of the Word. The Word of God does what it says.

Thus, we talk about the Word of God in three ways: 1) the Word become flesh, Christ himself; 2) the preaching of the Word of the cross and resurrection, and 3) the Word written down, the Book, the Bible.

To us, 2000 years after the First Century, it may seem that the Bible came first and from that "Book" we do preaching. But really the preaching came first, and the Book, the Bible, came later.

Why this order? Because of Easter, because of his resurrection. Ever since that first Easter, he is living and present not just in one place but wherever “two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). Out of his living presence in the preaching and sacraments of the early church came the Bible.

As he was present among those early Christians, he is also present among us as we gather in his name, present in power, power which accomplishes his purpose.

Thus, when we baptize a little one with water and in his name, he is present and claiming that child as his own. It's not anything the little one does or even that we do. Rather, the Lord himself is here making it happen.

The same is true for preaching. Romans 10:17: “Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the preaching of Christ.” This does not mean that it's up to us to hear rightly. Rather, it means that God is the one who creates the hearing. God does it. This is when it happens. This is the way it happens.

As Isaiah 55:11 says: “My word . . . shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:21: “It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.”

What then about the Bible? The Bible is a written record of the preaching of the early church, and thus the Bible is the third meaning of “the Word of God.” The Bible used rightly points us to Christ, the Word made flesh, the Word of the cross.

This is why we come to church and why we have a concern for planting churches near and far. Church matters because of how God works and what he is about. He works through his Word.

From time to time we muse about what would happen at our church if every Sunday we handed out \$20 bills or \$100 bills to everyone who came. The word would spread!

As we know, however, there is a hiddenness to the way God works.

The cross is folly, foolishness. Gathering in his name, to proclaim the Word of the cross, no doubt seems to the world a kind of folly, foolishness. Yet where the Word of God is, there the power of God is, achieving the purpose for which it was sent.

The New Testament says the kingdom of God is like a man who found a treasure buried in a field, and he sold everything he had in order to buy that field (Matt 13:44).

Or it's like the merchant, who upon finding a single pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had in order to buy it (Matt 13:45).

Or it's like the woman who lost her silver coin and swept diligently until she found it, and when she did, she called together her friends and neighbors and said: Rejoice with me! (Luke 15:8-10).

Matt 12:34 (Luke 6:45) says: "What the heart is full of, the mouth overflows with."

We come to church to fill up our hearts with the Word of God because, as Isaiah says:

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven. . . and 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 forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that for which I purpose and prosper in the thing for which I send it" (Isaiah 55:10-13).

The Word of God is food for life, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater. "From his fulness have we all received grace upon grace" (John 1:16).

Grace upon grace. That's not available generally but only through him. No other word does that. It's only here. Therefore, Paul writes: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (I Corinthians 2:20).

This is the way the Lord works and what he's about: Forgiveness and redemption. Where two or three are gathered in his name, there he is in the midst of them.

We rest in him. Through his Word, through the folly of the cross, he gives us life and makes us his forever. Amen