

GOD'S WILL BECOMES CONCRETE AND HEARABLE IN HIS WORD

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church about sixty days before the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord:

My Word which goes from My Mouth will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish that which I purpose and cause to prosper that for which I sent it.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

This week' theme is: *God's will becomes concrete and hearable in His Word*. In fact, by the revelation of the inerrant, inspired Word of God, testified to a true by God in our flesh, God has determined that it is not possible that the Word of God will not fulfill its purpose. That means that His Word is fixed in the heavens, and on earth, and that it will not move. In these rapidly changing times, the certainty of God's Word is declared to bring comfort. It stands, etched into the ears and hearts of God's people, in a manner which outlasts even words engraved in stone.

For the congregation in this place, at this time, the truth that *God's will becomes concrete and hearable in His Word* brings encouragement. The Word comforts us with words of promise. As we contemplate changes, some of which will impact our lives, and the lives of those whom God will draw into this community of the Faith, it is helpful to hear that God's Word does what He intends. Through His Word, God has given us a hunger to reach those who are not part of our congregation with the news of the Gospel – today declared in the Word which proclaims:

For as comes down the rain and the snow from the heavens, and there (they) do not return, unless (they) cause to water the earth and cause it to bring forth and

¹ Isaiah 55:11.

sprout and give seed to (the) Sower and Bread to (the) eater, so shall be My Word which goes forth from My Face: (it) will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish that which I purpose and cause to prosper (that) for which I sent it.²

For those who will read the transcript of this sermon, there are clues as to what the analogies – the prophet’s likening of rain and snow to the Word and its benefits – mean. So that those comparisons are clear to the hearers of the Word today – rain/snow and the Word of God are all gifts of God sent from heaven to do His will on earth. The prophet’s illustrations about the Word take us to what are perhaps our earliest childhood lessons about the “water cycle” – precipitation falls to earth, it waters the ground, giving that which is needed for life. Then some of it flows into streams, rivers, and the oceans. Next, due to the action of the wind, wave, and sun, much of it evaporates to return to the heavens, from whence it shall fall again. Rain and snow fall with a purpose – to water the earth, in the end to provide growth and new life that, ultimately, humans, the highest of God’s creatures, may have sustenance and life.

Just so it is, declares God through Isaiah, with God’s Word. It falls to earth to bring the water of eternal life to give Seed to the Sower and Bread to the eater. There is a Trinitarian arrangement which may be rightly found in today’s analogy between precipitation and the Word: the Father sends the Word from Heaven (Christ); Christ is the Seed planted into the earth; and the Holy Spirit takes the proclamation of that Seed to give the Bread of Life, the Word, to all who will hear. From that, you might discern clearly with regard to the Word spoken of in this text: the Seed is Christ; the Sower is

² *Isaiah 55:10-11.*

Christ; and the Bread is Christ. From that, since we have learned that God works through means, we understand that the proclaimed Word of God is the Seed; the Sower is Christ working through the Office He established, and the Bread is the Living Bread of Heaven – Christ given to His people. Of this Word of God, this Christ, God says:

My Word which goes from My Mouth will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish that which I purpose and cause to prosper that for which I sent it.³

Having heard that, you are free to grasp the reality that God will use His Word to accomplish His will – namely that all should hear, turn from their sins, and receive the gift of eternal life in Christ. That all people do not receive this gift from heaven is not an indication that God’s will is not being done. They, we, all still have sinful natures which rebel against God’s gifts, and thus God. That humans are free to reject the grace God showers upon us shows us that His will is not irresistible. We learn from texts like this that God desires His hearers to love Him freely and without compulsion.

God says that His Word which He pours forth from heaven – through the mouths of His preachers is a teaching of this text – *will accomplish that which I purpose and cause to prosper that for which I sent it*. That means that His Word will keep order in this world; show sinners their sins; and, grant the faithful the means they need to put down their sinful natures daily. That God promises that His Word will accomplish His purposes means: that God has taken on Himself all the punishment that sinners deserve; that it will show their Savior to those who recognize their sins and their need for Him;

³ *Isaiah* 55:11.

and that it will grant repentant sinners their Savior through the means He has chosen – the Bread of Life in Word and Sacrament.

Hear this clearly: the Word continues to go forth from heaven. It continues to bring that which people, you, need for life on this earth and into eternity. The Word is poured out upon you. It calls you to recognize your sins, and to confess them. If you think you have not sinned this past week or even yet today, you have just sinned! Turn from such sin. Believe that God has sent His Word to pay the price for your sins. Receive that which He is now showering forth – Jesus, the Seed, has died in the earth. The Word proclaims that He would rise from that earth, the first-fruits of new life to all who believe and confess Him as our Savior. Know that He now comes to you, the Bread of Life – through the proclaimed Word of God. Soon, taste and see His Good Word and the Seed that died and rose comes to plant forgiveness in you! God’s Word continues:

For in joy all of you will go out; and in peace all of you will be led forth; the mountains and the hills will break forth before your faces singing; and all (the) trees of the field will clap their hands. ⁴

There, in images of this earth, you have heard a description of those upon whom God’s Word has fallen, and who have received it with joy. There is joy here for you in this Gift from heaven, the Word that falls like rain and snow to bring life and growth before returning in another form to heaven from whence it came. God, through the inspired words of Isaiah, has shown for centuries, that all creation resounds with the Good News that falls from heaven. All creation rejoices in the Word that waters the earth

⁴ *Isaiah* 55:12.

with life and growth in Christ, with the Word brings forth life from death, saints from sinners!

Should you be tempted to take the analogies in this text literally, you would wish to discover, even now as God's Word is being preached, Mount Lemmon and Dove Mountain singing with joy. You would expect to see the trees visible from these windows, "clap their hands." Yet, these things are not happening!

Does this mean that the Word is not true?

Of course it does not. It means that, when the Word of God puts forth an analogy, a comparison from the known to the unknown, and declares that it is doing so with words such as, "like," "as," "in such manner," we are to receive the following as earthly illustrations of heavenly realities. Then, the Word remains true, and it works its truths in us according to God's purposes, His will. The illustrations continue, as God through His preacher declares:

Instead of the thorn will come up the cypress; instead of the brier will come up the myrtle; and it will be to YHWH for (a) Name, for (a) sign everlasting (that) will not be cut off.

With that which comes down from heaven, we have illustrations of that which the Word does in faithful hearers. (The ancient connotations of briars/thorns and cypress/evergreen are contrasted in this text). Annuals are replaced by perennials in the faithful hearers of the Word.

The deciduous thorns of sin are pulled out and burnt up. The coniferous majesty of the cypress is raised up in its place. That which was suitable for the fire is

replaced with that used for building. The scrubby, useless, clinging briars of temptation are plucked off – with pain at times. The evergreen Myrtle which, when these words were first declared, was used for producing perfume and food seasoning is planted by God in their place. The eternally useless, the life-parasites of the world are taken from us, and new, ever-living life is planted in us. That which symbolizes all that which brings pain and consternation is uprooted in us through the Word. That which symbolizes peace and joy are planted in us in their stead.

God's Word, as the rain and snow, are gifts from heaven. They all fall upon the good and the bad, sinners and saints, the deserving and undeserving. Today, the Word is falling upon you, even as the rain might! While you might take some pains to keep from getting wet from the rain, you are being soaked even now with the Word. Yes, you may raise the umbrella of your sinful nature over your head, in the hopes to keep from the washing of the Word.

But, as God has already washed you with His baptism, you have already been soaked. Sin has run off you. You have been presented clean before Him. Return now to the washing of the Word. Hear it grant you the Word Who has come to earth. Receive the Word poured into death for your sins. Believe the Word raised for your justification. Grasp with hands and arms of the Faith the Word who comes now, through proclamation, and soon, in the Bread of Life. You are free to rejoice with God's good creation that His gifts still fall from heaven. You are empowered to believe that *God's will becomes concrete and hearable in His Word.*

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Septuagesima (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Isaiah 55:10-13; II Corinthians 11:19-12:9; Luke 8:4-15

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Soli Deo Gloria

TRANSLATION, SECOND DRAFT

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