

## **GOD'S CHOSEN MEANS TO GRANT REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS**

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church on this 60<sup>th</sup> (ish) day 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.<sup>1</sup>*

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

As the Gesima sub-section of the Church Year began last week, many of you heard the Lord's call to reflect on His Word; to prepare in that Word for Lenten fasting and repentance; and to set aside time for special dedication to God's Word. You were called to recommit yourselves to outward bodily training that the Word might have free course. You may find new Lenten devotionals in the Narthex, along with a call now to consider the Stations of the Cross, to aide you in those good works. Along with those spiritual aides, the Word continues to be proclaimed to draw you away from the enticements of the world, your own sinful flesh, and the wiles of the devil.

Today, God declares to us His chosen means to grant you His ability to practice any number of penitential disciplines. He has repeatedly encouraged you to inwardly reflect upon, and then live in, His promises with words like these:

*My Word that 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.<sup>2</sup>*

That sentence summarizes the theme for this week. For the people of God whom He has assembled in this place at this time, they remain words of encouragement and words of promise. In them, we learn God's intent for His Word. From them, we can learn anew of His will for those who hear His Word in good and steadfast hearts. The Word that lies behind, under, and in today's Collect Prayer summed up this week's theme as it was offered up to our God and Father. Hear the theme petition again:

*Through Your Son Jesus Christ You have sown Your Holy Word among us:  
We pray that You will prepare our hearts by Your Holy Spirit, that we may diligently*

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<sup>1</sup> *Isaiah* 55:11.

<sup>2</sup> *Isaiah* 55:11.

*and reverently hear Your Word, keep it in good hearts, and bring forth fruit with patience....*

Now, we don't have at hand the thoughts that the Holy Spirit moved in the man who composed and published those words for the Church almost 500 years ago. Yet we do have the Word that the Spirit used to move him to write that ancient prayer. We heard it read from Introit Psalm through Gospel reading this day. Through the proclamation of that Word, Jesus sounds forth a clear call to those who hear His Word, *in hearts beautiful and good, to continue hearing the Word in steadfastness, also bearing fruit in long-suffering.*<sup>3</sup>

In light of that, consider this: last Sunday, as the Gesimas began, you who heard the Sunday (and Wednesday) readings declared in this place had 967 translated words of Scripture directly proclaimed into your ears, hearts, minds and lives. At a hearable speaking pace, it took about five minutes, five seconds to read out loud. (In this sermon already, you have heard more than half of the words spoken in all of last Sunday's readings). With that in mind, I ask you:

- How have you done in holding fast to last Sunday's less than 1,000 words and bearing fruit with them these past seven days?
- Have you kept those five minutes and five seconds of proclamation at the center of your being – your heart?
- Have those moments of God's word worked in you beautiful, generous, noble, honest, and good hearts in terms of being godly every moment since you heard that Word?
- Have you continued to hear the Word of God each day, all the while holding tightly to it?
- Did you discover yourself bearing spiritual fruit in endurance, long-suffering, and patience through the power of God given in the Sunday readings?

If you have not, know that Christ died bearing such failures, sins, to keep His Word in His Person that you may live in Him. Questions such as those just asked can be uncomfortable to answer for the Christian who is not afflicted with the sin of self-

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 8:15b.

righteousness. They are designed to move us to consider our state, your state, before God when faced with the clear teachings of His Word – written, proclaimed and incarnate.

With such questions, the Law of God works God's will to convict, condemn and kill your old nature. It does God's alien work. In part, the audible declaration of God's Law fulfills His ancient promise. It proclaims to you your state apart from Christ's righteousness, which is part of that which is contained in this promise:

*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.<sup>4</sup>*

God's Word will work His will, namely, to call sinners, you, to repentance. He wills to give you His means of grace that brings you forgiveness, to call you to walk in newness of life. God's chosen means grants repentance and forgiveness.

Those gifts He has willed to deliver through His Word to sinners, to you, through the ministry of the Word. The evangelical confession of the Faith poured forth a lot of ink to ensure that anyone who comes into contact with true Gospel preaching Bible teaching congregations understands that scriptural doctrine. We confess: "The ministry of the Word has God's command and glorious promises."<sup>5</sup> In addition to other texts, the confessors cited today's Old Covenant theme verse to support that teaching. After placing ordination and the laying on of hands under the understanding that they are given by Christ to His Church in like manner to Baptism, the Lord's Supper and Holy Absolution, they continue: "the Church has the command to appoint ministers... for we know that God approves this ministry and is present in it."<sup>6</sup> They call the faithful to, "extol the ministry of the Word with every possible kind of praise, in opposition to..." those who convince themselves the Holy Spirit comes through their own spiritual and physical preparations.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Isaiah* 55:11.

<sup>5</sup> Tappert, et al. *The Book of Concord*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959, 212:11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Having declared that, some of you are aware that there is a concern voiced in the Church today that men, ministers who are called to preach God's Word, are unwilling, untrained, and/or perhaps unable – on account of their battles with their own sins – to preach to Christians about good works and the new obedience to God's Word that same Word requires.<sup>8</sup>

That, dear ones, shows disdain for the Office and the Word of God. Even so, their followers appear to appreciate that they are not being called to daily repentance and sorrow over their sins, while bringing forth the fruits of the faith with long-suffering.

I pray you find no occasion to accuse either of your pastors of sinning against you in such manner. The Word is full of that which many of you have learned to call the Third Use of the Law. It is the guide of the Word by which Christians may be encouraged and exhorted to thoughts, words and deeds of sacrificial love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.<sup>9</sup> The Word of God urges:

*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. Instead of the thorn the cypress will come up; instead of the brier the myrtle will come up; and it will be to YHWH for (a) Name, for (a) sign everlasting (that) will not be cut off.*<sup>10</sup>

Joy and peace are fruits of the Faith God that works in the center of the renewed human being. Those gifts are placed in those who hear, believe and desire to lead their lives according to His Word. Joy is a transformation of the inner man. That God's Word of grace works in those who continue to receive His pure Word. Peace is the new relationship with God that His received Word continues to work in the faithful.

The text for this day also declares the fruits of the Faith. These you are called to live in every moment of your lives. That is easy and difficult to do as they are truly God's gifts to you! He earned them for you – on the cross. He presented them to you in the same manner, through the same means, that He gave them to Aiden Abraham Noriega

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<sup>8</sup> Internet. <http://surburg.blogspot.com/2015/08/marks-thoughts-what-is-soft.html>. <http://gottesdienstonline.blogspot.com/2015/08/guest-post-new-antinomianism-denying.html>. Accessed 18 February 2017.

<sup>9</sup> cf. *Galatians* 5:22-23a.

<sup>10</sup> *Isaiah* 55:12-13.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit today. He has received treasures that are eternal on this, his heavenly adoption day into our Father's household.

You confess that to be true, not just for him, but for you, every time you recite the Third Article of the Creed. There, you declare that not only the Faith, but also the fruits of the Faith that you live out in sanctification – holiness of living – are the Holy Spirit's work. The Spirit is the Gift that gives God's gifts to those who bear His Name.

Essentially, that which Isaiah's prophetic text is declaring into your ears today is that God is the Giver of even the good works that have been prepared for you to produce in the Faith. They flow from the joy and peace that come from God's leading you out of captivity to sin. The opening lines of the Old Covenant reading paint a word-picture that declares that the Word that produces fruit in the faithful is God's absolute gift from heaven, as they proclaim:

*For as the rain and the snow comes down from the heavens, and do not return there, but cause to water the earth and cause it to bring forth and sprout and give seed to (the) Sower and bread to (the) eater, so will be My Word which goes 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.<sup>11</sup>*

God inspired the use of the earthly image of beneficial snow and rain watering the earth for the people He led out from captivity in Egypt, through the wilderness of Sin (remember, you heard about that last week), into the Promised Land. He used the illustration of precipitation so that they, whose ancestors had settled into a land flowing with milk and honey, would remember they needed to trust in Him alone for that which would bring about the things they needed to sustain their lives.

About seven centuries had passed then since the Exodus. The following centuries had been accompanied by the people's falling away from the Faith in the One Who had led them through the desert. They had turned to other gods, and to human rulers as the sources of their livelihoods. They had turned away from God's chosen means to grant repentance and forgiveness.

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<sup>11</sup> *Isaiah 55:10-11.*

The northern kingdom, as Isaiah's words were first spoken, was either in the process of being, or had been recently been, destroyed. God, Who had given His Word of promise that He would not eternally delay the full force of His Law, had, on account of their unfaithfulness, turned them out of their land. Her people were carted off.

In the darkness of that reality, the faithful remnant among them needed to hear that all the good God had promised to would come. They still believed that God was the One who continued to give them all they needed for this body and life. They would be comforted to hear that God was always faithful to His Word – even when it seemed to them that He was delaying. This is His reminder for them:

*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.<sup>12</sup>*

Those words call to you today that you might remain faithful, for God is faithful. God reveals in His Word the call to you to remain hearers of His Word, to receive His gifts through His Church's ministers. Through those means, He continues to pour forth His blessings, as the text declares, even as the rain and snow continue to water the earth and the cause the beneficial fruits of the earth to grow. It is that Word that grants you new life and the power of God to walk in His Word every moment of your lives. That means that you have His gift that works to turn you from sins and to life in joy and peace even now. It also means this Word of promise remains true for you:

*Instead of the thorn the cypress will come up; instead of the brier the myrtle will come up; and it will be to YHWH for (a) Name, for (a) sign everlasting (that) will not be cut off.<sup>13</sup>*

What is that Word of God promising to you who walk in the Word, doing God's good works?

You heard it, it is there... The text declares that God promises to remove the curse from the faithful! When Adam sinned, the whole world was cursed. He was told that the ground would produce thorns and thistles.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 55:11.

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 55:12-13.

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 3:17b–19.

That which comes to all humans on account of Adam's fall into sin, God is going to reverse! In today's Word, Adam's descendants who are named with God's Name hear that God will turn about the effects of the Fall for us. The image used is of thorns and briars turned into evergreens. That depicts that the renewal of the Creation, veiled now in God's making you a new creation in Christ, will be everlasting. In Christ, you are made new, even as you continue to receive God's chosen means which lead to repentance, forgiveness and good works in Christ!

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

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

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

February 19, 2017

*Pastor Michael A. Morehouse*

***Soli Deo Gloria***

**TRANSLATION, SECOND DRAFT**

*For as comes down the rain and the snow from the heavens, and there do not return, but cause to water the earth and cause it to bring forth and sprout and give seed to Sower and bread to eater, so will be My Word which goes from My face will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish that which I purpose and cause to prosper for which I sent it.*

*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 trees of the field will clap their hands.*

*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.*