

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lena, IL – 16 July 2023**  
**Seventh Sunday after Pentecost - Year A – Lectionary 15**

**1st Reading: *Isaiah 55:10-13***

**Psalm: *65:1-13***

**2nd Reading: *Romans 8:1-11***

**Gospel: *Matthew 13:1-23***

**Sermon - Vicar Thomas J. Mosbø**

In the name of the Father, ✠ and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Are you sitting comfortably? Good, then let's begin.

That is a typically English way of beginning to tell a story, and it is said to make sure that we are ready to listen. It evokes an image of being tucked up in a cozy chair, perhaps beside a fireplace, with a nice cup of tea, in the anticipation of re-hearing a favourite tale, or of engaging in a new adventure, especially when we have an expert story-teller prepared to lead us along the way.

During some of the days last week, when I wasn't able to be by her side, Coral was tucked into her comfy bed, with crocheting in her hands, and a cup of tea set to the side, and then she was able to put some CDs on and listen to some of our favourite stories read expressively by British actors - stories like *The Wind in the Willows*, which tell of the adventures of Ratty and Mole as they live along the riverbank, and short stories by the incomparable Christian fantasy writer J.R.R. Tolkien. She found herself carried away to magical realms of fairies and dragons, where the unexpected might be expected to happen.

Jesus, of course, was an expert story-teller. Indeed, his brief, engaging stories that we call parables provided the means by which he made his teachings clear to his disciples, and as we hear them read we should always be ready again to hear the unexpected, even in the parables we are most familiar with.

Today Jesus is telling us a story about listening to stories. So, are you sitting comfortably? Some of the listeners *in* Jesus' parable - who are the different types of soil - and some of the listeners *to* Jesus' parable - the people he was speaking to - weren't listening very carefully at all.

A sower went out to sow - we don't really talk about "sowers" very much these days, so let's call him a farmer. A farmer went out to plant his seeds, and he rather extravagantly scattered his seeds pretty much everywhere in the hope that it would take root in as many places as it could. Jesus later explains to his disciples that he himself is the farmer, and the seeds he is scattering are his Words, his teaching, his stories.

But, it seems, there are always reasons why we don't really listen. The stories may sound confusing, but we don't even try to understand, so it's as if the birds come and fly away with what we are hearing. Or we hear it eagerly enough, but don't bother to try to let it sink in and have its effect on us, so it withers away. Or - and this is the one I'm prone to do myself - we are distracted by the cares and worries of our lives, and the message is choked away by the weeds of worry.

But if we do listen - so our minds and hearts are fertile soil for Jesus' words - then we are carried away to the mystical realm of truth and light, the Holy Spirit awakens in our hearts, our lives are filled with meaning, and we grow and thrive, and live out the life of goodness God has for us, spreading that goodness in the world. What a wonderful and fantastic story.

And Isaiah also concurs with this. He tells us this morning that:

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower, so shall [God's] word be that goes out; it shall not return empty. For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." There's a fantasy story for you - the mountains shall sing and the trees shall clap their hands in joy.

And I also chose to read the extra bit in the Gospel today, between the parable itself and its explanation, even though it wasn't appointed in the lectionary, because in that interlude Jesus is telling his disciples exactly what he is saying in the parable. People don't want to listen. They don't want to pay attention. So he tries to give them a way of understanding by means of his clever stories, and they still won't listen. And this is why Jesus says that "to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away". The more we listen and hear what the Holy Spirit is telling us, the more good fruit we will produce, but if we refuse to listen, or forget what we have heard, then even the little bit of good that we may do will become less and less, withering away to nothing in the end.

In a way, then, this parable is Jesus' introduction to all his other parables - and in Mark's Gospel, this is actually the very first parable that Jesus tells. It is Jesus' way of saying: "Are you sitting comfortably?" Are you ready to listen? Are you ready to hear the most wonderful tale that has ever been told? Let it take root in your heart and grow in your spirit and in your life.

So, as we continue to come together to hear God's Word, let our minds be fertile soil to receive his Word eagerly, for as the Psalmist has told us this morning, "Awesome things will he show us in his righteousness, the God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the oceans far away".

Amen!

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