

God's Word Shall Succeed

“so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” Isaiah 55:11

This weekend's Old Testament and Gospel readings couldn't have been more fitting for my family's recent trip to Nebraska and Kansas. Driving and living around fields of corn and wheat, I got to experience firsthand the agricultural idea that our God is highlighting in these two readings. Most of the corn fields, appeared healthy living up to and even exceeding the old saying, “Knee high by the Fourth of July!” And the timing of our trip allowed for me to see several ripe and ready-for-harvest fields of golden wheat.

As I took in these scenes of Nebraska and Kansas, it struck me how precise farmers can be now in planting with modern technology and equipment. From the little I've picked up from those who know the farming business, it is amazing what tractors and combines are capable of doing. These machines can be set to very specific metrics in order to sow a field for the best harvest possible. Different products can be used to enhance a field's production and apps can help predict weather so that irrigation can be used effectively and efficiently for the desired outcome, a plentiful harvest.

I'm sure that what I've mentioned only generally hits at the precision that can be used in farming today. And if we talked with an expert, I'd imagine that there are numerous other details that can be shared about precision with farming. Because there can be such precision with today's farming, it makes the parable from our Gospel reading jump out to me a lot more. The way this parable describes the sowing of the seed, it sounds so imprecise and even at times wasteful. The seed is cast onto four very different kinds of soil with little to no regret as to how the seed is received.

With the ways that modern day farming has grown more precise, it's very tempting to think that we should be able to take Jesus' parable and modernize it to be more precise to produce an even greater harvest. This mindset leads to misleading focuses that move us away from the seed that God provides to the soil that will receive the seed and even to how the seed is sown. Sometimes, we look for ways to target unreceptive soil and clean it up prior to sowing the seed. Or we try to control where we cast the seed in order that nothing is wasted, at least according to our own judgement.

As soon as we give into this temptation of trying to make Jesus' parable more precise, we inevitably find ourselves trying to do the work that only God can do, that is cause the seed to take root and grow into a plentiful harvest. Unlike the advances in farming technology, we can't modernize Jesus' parable for a greater harvest. This is the work of the Holy Spirit alone and we aren't in control of His precision and efficiency – that isn't our role! And if we come away from this parable looking at anything other than the gift of the seed generously scattered then we're going to miss Jesus' point.

In God's kingdom, as described by this parable, success isn't driven by detailed precision towards the desired outcome. Rather success is seen in the simple reality that the seed is sown. There isn't undue angst over which soil the seed falls on and there isn't unwarranted pressure on the exact number of the yield. Rather there is trust that as the seed is sown it will have an impact and be effective.

Our Old Testament reading makes this trust and understanding very apparent. Isaiah (55:10-11) writes, **“For as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return there 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 out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”**

Through the prophet Isaiah, God provides a great reminder to us as we think about this parable in our Gospel reading. God's Word shall succeed. Not because we've done anything more precise to make it successful but because God promises to be at work! Our focus doesn't need to shift beyond God's Word! If God's Word is going out then it will be productive that is what God promises and we don't need to doubt this promise of God. He's trustworthy and He will surely do what He promises!

Instead of getting caught up in matters of precision that distract from God's Word, we are directed back to where God's Word is going out faithfully as He intends. Our trust is placed firmly and squarely on God's Word and His work through His Word and not any of our efforts by which we've tried to enhance the impact of God's Word. Our God, who saved us so precisely by living, dying and rising for the whole world's sake has also generously given us this saving message to share freely with the world that so desperately and frequently needs to hear it and yes, that includes you and me.

We need God's Word sown into our lives regularly as does the whole world! Regardless of whatever season of life we might be in and regardless of whatever soil description might fit us at this moment, we need God's Word sown into our lives! We need His Word sown into us at church in the liturgy, songs, sermon, sacraments, Bible studies and prayers. We need His Word sown into us at home through our family conversations, devotions and prayers. We need His Word sown into us wherever we go, in the activities we prioritize for our lives and even in the media we consume. We need God's Word sown into our lives frequently because we know He promises to be at work for our sake.

And knowing that God promises to be at work through His Word brings us tremendous comfort and hope. His promise leads us to stay connected to His Word even when its results aren't immediately seen. His promise encourages us to share His Word even when we don't think there will be any impact. His promise assures us that putting our trust and patience in His Word won't be in vain. With this promise in our lives, we trust that God will continue to sustain and grow our faith. We continue to pray that God would work through His Word to bring about forgiveness and healing where it is needed. We continue to patiently endure with those around us who aren't receptive to God's Word at this moment firmly believing that God can use His Word for His good purpose to change struggling hearts and minds.

Truth be told, driving around the wheat and corn fields of Nebraska and Kansas, wasn't the only fitting connection to our Old Testament and Gospel readings this weekend. I also got another powerful reminder of God's Word at work in the life of my son, Everett. Over the past several weeks and especially during our trip, Everett's communication has just blossomed. One day, as he and I were driving by ourselves, I heard this sweet little voice start to sing, "Yes, Jesus loves me ... yes, Jesus loves me!" Unprompted, he broke into this great reminder of God's love for him. But what makes that moment even more powerful is that, my wife, Madeline, will even ask him, "Who loves you?" to which he will respond, "Jesus!" By God's grace through His Word, this little one is learning and trusting in God's love for Him.

In a few weeks, my family will get to celebrate the second anniversary of Everett's baptism and these experiences are an encouraging reminder of God's ongoing, baptismal work through His Word! What He started in Everett two years ago, He is continuing to sustain and grow. And by His grace He will continue to bring His work in Everett to completion on the day when He returns! So, take heart friends, God's Word is at work in this place and Everett is just one example! From the font, to the grave, and everywhere in between, God's Word shall succeed in the purpose for which He sends it.

So, today isn't the day for us to give up on God's Word! Even though our circumstances may make it seem like His Word isn't working, that His Word appears to go out imprecisely and even perhaps wastefully, now isn't the time to cut ourselves off from where He is scattering His Word. He has promised that His Word shall succeed. And so, we pray that the Lord would remember this promise in our lives each day and to grant us endurance and strength to patiently wait for His Word to make its impact. This day and until He returns, may our hearts and minds continue to rest on God's Word which will succeed in the thing for which He sends it. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan