

Isaiah 55:10-13

¹⁰Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return there unless they first water the earth, make it give birth, and cause it to sprout, so that it gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹in the same way my word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty. Rather, it will accomplish whatever I please, and it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it. ¹²Yes, you will go out with joy, and in peace you will be carried along. The mountains and the hills will break out in shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. ¹³Instead of thorns, a fir tree will grow up. Instead of briars, a myrtle tree will grow up. This will make a name for the LORD. It will serve as an everlasting sign that will not be cut off.

Sermon for Pentecost 8, July 26, 2020, St. Paul's Green Garden MI

Text: Isaiah 55:1-13

Theme: "Take to Heart the Blessings God's Word Brings You"

In the name of Jesus, Dear fellow-redeemed,

We should not take rain for granted. Rain is a blessing from God. We know that farm fields and gardens need rain. So do flower beds and orchards. Jesus said God sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous, on believers and unbelievers. The difference is that the believer knows the rain comes from God even though it falls from the sky according to natural processes that God has created and set in motion. I have been told by people who know, that apple trees will drop quite a lot of fruit before it is ripe if the trees don't get water at the right time. We should not take rain for granted. So when God through Isaiah says that rain gives us a picture of the way God's Word works, we should sit up and take notice.

God uses illustrations like this in the Bible so that we understand better, how God wants to bless us. Our Gospel reading is a good example of this. Jesus told the parable of the farmer planting his seed in the field. Jesus explains the parable telling us that not everyone who hears the word believes. Some are overcome by Satan's temptations. Others are too worried about how they will take care of themselves in the sinful world. And still others make a good beginning in faith, but soon lose it because they fail to grow in God's Word. And this is really why Jesus told this parable, and why God in the O.T. through Isaiah explains to us that God's Word brings us many blessings. We who are God's children will want to take to heart the blessings God's word brings to us.

Rain seems to be such a simple, natural way for all kinds of plants, shrubs and trees to be nurtured. Often we don't even seem to notice it. It works silently,

without fanfare, but you can see how it affects the life of the plant or tree. So with God's Word. It comes to us, in a sense, like a gentle shower, through simple words. But like rain that comes down, and before it evaporates and becomes part of the hydrological cycle, God says it causes plants to bud and flourish, God's Word also comes to our hearts in a way that is not pushy, or with fanfare. Just think of the sacrament of baptism, given to little children. It is uncomplicated water and the Word that works faith, even in the heart of a child. So we dare not think that just because we are adults that God's Word has less of an affect on our hearts. How often have God's promises comforted and calmed your heart? How often have you sinned and had God's Word bring you the comfort that your sins are forgiven? And remember that God's word brings you great blessings in the sacrament of Holy Communion. When you receive the body and blood of Jesus he is giving you his personal assurance that he loves you and that you are forgiven for all your sins. This is a blessing for you that God wants you to take to heart. Believe it and trust it.

So one of the blessings of God's Word to us is that it works like rain. It is simple enough for a young child to grasp; it comes to us though God's power. Just as we cannot cause rain to come down, it has to come from God, so we cannot cause God to reveal his word to us. He must come to us and reveal his love and mercy to us. And when we realize that we do not deserve the blessings of his word, how thankful we are that he has chosen, in mercy, to reveal to us the truth of the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. And then remember that you and I cannot even come to faith by our own power. Rather, it is the power of the Holy Spirit, working through the word that brings us to faith. And God does it all through the simple word that he brings to us.

This is why God uses the example of rain. God's purpose for sending rain is simple. It is so that plants of every kind receive water, because through water plants take up nutrients from the soil. Through those nutrients, plants grow and bear fruit. God puts it this way regarding his word: **“Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return there unless they first water the earth, make it give birth, and cause it to sprout, so that it gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater, in the same way my word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty. Rather, it will accomplish whatever I please, and it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it.”**

The Lord through Isaiah wants us to know that wherever his word is proclaimed he will cause people to believe. Go back to the parable of the farmer planting seed. Rain has to come down to bring the seed to life. When it sprouts we know the rain has done its work. So when people come to faith, we know that God

has fulfilled his promise, once again, to bring people to believe in him, just as he has promised. This truth is very important for us also, even as we have faith now.

The same word of God that worked faith in you, now also sustains you, just as rain causes the growing plant to, not only remain alive, but to grow and bear fruit. Now that you have faith, you and I should not want to remain stagnant in our faith, but to grow and bear the fruit of the faith that grows within us. All of this happens when we understand that all the times we have misused God's name, all the times we have thought evil about our neighbor, all the times we have showed dishonor to those God has placed over us, for all those times, you and I deserve God's punishment. Yet, in mercy he punished his son Jesus in our place. And when you believe this truth, it is clear evidence that God's Word has done its work in a simple, yet powerful way; even more powerful than rain that causes plants and trees to grow. And what joy and peace this brings us as we go out into the world each day. This joy and peace is for you to take to heart.

I suppose it would stand to reason that if a farmer or gardener gets rain at just the right time, it fills him with joy to know that his crops are getting the moisture they need. And that knowledge also fills him with peace because he knows he can put worry aside. So when God says his word will not go out from him and come back empty, but will accomplish what he pleases, he wants us to know, not only do people believe in his forgiveness and promise of eternal life, but these promises also bring joy and peace to the hearts of us sinners. He says, "**Yes, you will go out with joy, and in peace you will be carried along. The mountains and the hills will break out in shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.**"

Can you imagine the joy in the hearts of the people of Israel when God finally led them out of Egypt. They were no longer slaves. God had redeemed them from Egypt and the torment of slavery. There must have been joyful celebrating even as they moved out. Perhaps in their minds they believed they would be in the promised land in a matter of weeks. But in that moment they weren't concerned about how long it would take. They were living in the joy of their new freedom, and in the peace that God was their protector.

A century or so after Isaiah the people of Judah would be allowed to return to Israel after being captive in Babylon for 70 years. Isaiah says even the mountains, hill and trees will clap for joy. What is he really saying. God's Word brings us joy and peace. This is the purpose that God sends his word to us. When the people of Judah left Babylon and returned, they could be sure God would keep his promise to

send a Savior to the world through them. And the Messiah would be their Savior too.

The very same Savior has taken away your sins, too. If we are honest it doesn't take much to see our own sins does it. Don't necessarily think of the big visible sins of theft, murder or adultery. Think of your pettiness, you back biting, your bitter words or thoughts toward others. Think of hatred in your heart toward someone. All those sins and more deserve God's eternal punishment in hell. But you and I will not suffer there because Jesus, God's own son took all of our sins on himself, paid for them with his own blood and rose from the grave to prove that he had wiped out our sins forever.

This brings us joy that God gives us heaven as a free gift, and brings us indescribable peace. What if you were to die from covid-19 or any other illness? Would that be disaster? Your loved ones would miss you, certainly. You would probably be missed by many friends as well. But where would you be? In heaven, of course. That is sure and certain because Jesus says so. So be at peace because there is nothing anywhere that can deprive you of heaven. Paul says, **neither famine or nakedness or danger or sword, not height nor depth or anything else on all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

When I was in my last year of college, my grandfather suffered a severe heart attack. He did not know he had had one, but he was not feeling very well, so he went to the doctor. She put him in the hospital immediately. Now my grandfather was a devout Lutheran layman. He was not worried about his eternal destiny. In human terms his doctor acknowledged that his trust in God without panic probably contributed to his recovery. You see, we can live in joy and peace because of God's promises. And when God delivers us from this world, it will only show more clearly the fame of the Lord.

When you and I hear and believe in the gospel of our Lord, we long for our home in heaven. And here God uses a picture of to show us our joy. It is so great he says, **"all the trees of the field will clap their hands. ¹³Instead of thorns, a fir tree will grow up. Instead of briars, a myrtle tree will grow up."** In a word picture God tells us our joy is so great it will spread to the trees and where there are thorns and briars, beautiful trees will grow instead. Think of the beauty of the forests in the porcupine mountains in our own UP. If you have seen them you know there is nothing quite like them as they spread out as far as the eye can see. This is how God describes our joy in knowing that he has claimed us as his children and promises us an unending life with him.

This is the accomplishment for which our Lord will always be known and for which we will praise him for eternity in heaven. And his fame will be known, as Paul says in Philippians he will be praised by things in heaven and on earth and under the earth. God's name will be known, even by those who refuse to acknowledge him here on earth.

In the last verses here Isaiah may have had in mind the monuments that ancient kings would put up to taut all their accomplishments and victories. But often those monuments were torn down or defaced by kings who would follow so that king could build a monument for his own fame. And even if a certain king's monument to himself was allowed to stand, over the centuries it would suffer erosion from the weather and other factors.

But God's fame will never be torn down. Throughout all eternity, God's love for you and me in Christ will be known. And friends, may we show the world by our words, our actions and everything we do that we have joy in our Lord. May our joy be infectious so that others want to know, "why in a world full of uncertainty are you and I so full of joy and peace?" And then you can tell them, "we have God's Word and his word tells us that he has saved us from all sin, chosen us to be his children, and he wants you and your loved ones to be his children, too." You see, the blessings that God's word brings us are not blessings to horde. They are blessings for you and me to trust and believe that they affect our whole lives. These are blessings to share so that they multiply, again and again and again. Amen.