

Sermon Transcript for February 20, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So when we listen to the Old Testament lesson, we hear about the rain and snow coming down from heaven and the seed from the sower giving bread to the eater. It also talks about the word of God coming out of his mouth, it will not return to empty. So we see the seed and sower and the word of God being connected together. When we go to the parable in Luke, we hear about the seed and the sower and the word of God producing the fruit. We can see how those two are easily connected. The Hebrew passage seems a little bit obscure as to how this is connected to the theme of the word of God going forth and accomplishing what He desires.

So it begins by saying, "So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from His." So what does that have to do with the word of God going forth and feeding the soil and nurturing the soil and causing fruit to grow from it?

In order to figure that out, I really think we need to turn in our hymnal to page 321 where the small catechism is listed. We are going to look at the third commandment, which is of course about the Sabbath day. So Hebrews talks about the Sabbath day of rest. The third commandment is remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

So the question then, should be asked, how does one keep the Sabbath day holy? I mean, that's the important part of it. If we don't know how to keep it holy, we're not keeping it. So what does it mean to keep the Sabbath day holy? Let's look at what Luther has to say in his definition. "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, what does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it." So, in other words, as we look at the Sabbath day, what makes the Sabbath day holy? What makes anything holy? The word of God. How do we honor the Sabbath and how do we keep the Sabbath day? We keep it by hearing the word, by coming to receive the word and not despising the teaching of God.

Then that makes sense when we connect it with the sower and the seed, because what is the sower sowing? The word of God. So where do we most regularly hear and are fed by the word of God? We are fed by the word of God, in the preaching of the word, in the reception of the word in the divine service here today. So by seeking that Sabbath rest, we are seeking the word of God. Isn't it interesting, when we talk about the sower and the seed. We talk about the seed that lands in the good soil and it grows and it produces fruit. So whenever we think about producing something, we think about work.

I need to strive and I need to work to get my paycheck. I need to dig or do something in order to produce something else. Yet when it comes to the gospel and when it comes to the proclamation of the word and the spreading of the gospel to all nations, how does it begin? It begins with rest. Not with labor, not with striving, but with rest. Because in our rest, we hear the word of God. When we recognize our rest is a gift from God, we realize that the working of the word is not our responsibility. The working of the word is God's responsibility, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

What does he say in Isaiah? He says that "My word will go forth out of My mouth. It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that, which I propose." The word of God is doing the work. We are being worked upon by the word of God. Having been worked on by the word, having been restored and renewed by that word, we are then refreshed and renewed so that we can go forth and labor in the vineyard. From the parable last week, labor in the vineyard and serve our Lord, but serve our Lord in the power of his word.

So we keep the word of God first and foremost in our hearts and our minds in all that we say and do. Because it is only by the power of the word that anything is accomplished in the spreading of the gospel. So before we begin any day, we pray and we ask that the word of God might dwell in us richly. So that beginning of that Sabbath, that resting as we rest and hear the word. Then from that resting comes the ability, through the power of the Holy Spirit to serve God and proclaim it, that I'm doing nothing else, but serving the word and allowing the word to work through my words and my actions to accomplish His desires.

In other words, everything that we do is a good work under the Lord and a service to the kingdom of God, regardless of whether we know what we're doing or not. Or whether we have got the right answers or we can solve all the problems. No, we are called to live in faith and in rest. We are called to live in trust. In the introit we talked about how David begins by talking about how he feels like God is sleeping. Like He's not listening and hearing him. Because his soul is bowed down. Yet he remembers the deeds of God to the fathers before him. How often do we, when we are weighed down and heavy laden in this world, how often does the word of God, the faithfulness of the richness of God's grace upon us, how often does that fill us with hope? Not because the situation has necessarily changed, but because we have heard the word of God.

During this season, instead of singing, hallelujah, we sing return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful. Return to the Lord, how do we return to the Lord? Through His word. He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Isn't that a comfort to us, that He is slow to anger and that He is abounding in steadfast love.

What does that abounding mean? Again, generous beyond belief, just abounding. It's like you can almost see God leaping and just throwing His grace and mercy around with joyful and wanted abandoned. Kind of like the message that we hear in the parable about the sower and the seed. Again, the parable is about the strangeness of God, the uniqueness of God, that is not like us. So there was a sower who went out to sow seeds. So again, we're talking about the kingdom of God, and we're talking about a person. So the sower, he is going out. He throws the seed. Again, God is a bad businessman. He's a bad farmer. He would go broke if He used his seed this way.

I grew up on a small toy farm, and I know my dad put the seed exactly where it needed to go. He didn't waste it in the places where he knew it wasn't going to grow. There was always a bog in one of the areas that was just too wet and you just didn't put anything there, because it was just going to die.

Yet this farmer throws it in the bog, throws it in the rocks, throws it in the weeds, throws it on the path itself. That's nuts. Yet who knows who out there is part of the hard path, is part of the rocky soil or the weedy soil or the good soil. Do you know the hearts of the men and women out there? Do you know how God's word has been working in their lives? Preparing them to hear what he has to say through us. We have no idea. We don't know the situation of their hearts.

So we are called to be generous with our praises of her father, to thank God in all circumstances and to praise Him for everything that happens in our lives. Because through that, the word then goes forth from us to them. It accomplishes what God desires, not me. I failed too often, quite frankly, to accomplish what God desires. But I trust that the word works in me and through me to accomplish what He desires. So my hope is found in resting. Resting in the word of God and allowing that word to work within me and through me to restore me, to renew and transform my mind through his word. Because I know that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

So we are called in all of this, in all the teaching that we have today to rest in the Lord, rest in his word, hear the hope that comes. David started out by feeling like God was not listening. That God did not hear him and did not care. In this couple of years we have faced this pandemic and the shutdowns and the mandates and the animosity and the strife between everybody, the increase in depression and anxiety in the world, even amongst the little kids, what is the

answer? What is the hope? The hope is the word of God, which as it drives David from first feeling like he is rejected and not heard to then remembering, God has performed in the days of old. Surely if He performed, then, He's going to perform now. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. So if He accomplished good then and He saved them then, surely His word has said He will save us now.

So we rest in the promises of God, and trust that His word will restore us and renew us and give us hope. That is a message that this world needs to hear. You don't have to convince them you're right. You don't have to have all the answers to their questions. You don't have to negate every argument that they have. All you have to do is trust the word, hold fast to His promises and live in peace. Because through the word you have rest, and there's no greater peace than the rest that comes in the word of God. That will accomplish God's will in our lives, and in everybody that we come in contact with. May that grace and that mercy and that peace and that rest be and abide with you always now and forever more unto life everlasting. Amen.