

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – 2023

Isaiah 55:10-13

Romans 8:12-17

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Grace; you're saved by grace. God's grace saves you (from death and hell). Grace means that your salvation is His work from first to last, from beginning to end, from top to bottom. Good luck trying to save yourself. Good luck trying to contribute to your salvation. Good luck "good-working" yourself into heaven. Receiving something you didn't deserve and could never earn (that's God's grace). Christ dying for you before you asked, before you wanted it, before you knew that you were a damned sinner (that's grace). "When you were dead in trespasses and sins, God made you alive in Christ, it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:5). The Son of God bleeding and dying for a people who hate Him, who spurn His mercy, who prefer lies and darkness and rank unbelief to the truth and the light of His kingdom and the bliss of heaven (that's grace). Everyone; indiscriminate love poured out on the Holy Cross for *everyone* irrespective of whether they believe it or not, whether they treasure it or not, whether they repent or not (that's grace). All of Christ's righteousness, every last bit of it, credited to your account as a gift; all of our heavenly Father's favor being lavished upon a sinner like you; God taking the initiative to claim you as His own even when you were His active enemy (that's grace).

How many of y'all believe that it is a dangerous world out there? Spiritual danger; are you aware that there is spiritual danger in this world? Do y'all believe that there isn't anything as threatening to a human being as spiritual danger? If I were to ignore the tactics of the enemy, if I were to ignore the wolf that comes into the meadow with the intention of feasting on Christ's lambs, if I were to ignore it when the sheep wander into poppy fields and ignore it when the sheep begin to crave septic liquid posing as water, what kind of shepherd would I be? A father who feeds his children, clothes them, houses them, educates them but disregards their spiritual welfare – has that father done his job as a protector, has he done his job as a sentry for his children's souls? It is a dangerous world. Are you a savvy Christian? Do you see the world in the terms that Jesus uses to describe it? Is humanity more determined to follow God and His Word or is rebellion on the rise? Oh, Pastor, rebellion is such a strong word. To reject God and His Word *is* rebellion. He is the Creator. All truth resides in Him. Life is His gift. To reject His ways and adopt anything else is rebellion. Beautifully, genuinely, gracefully, God loves the rebellious and will continue to call them to Himself. But if folks reject Him permanently, what is left?

Jesus tells a parable to get you to see this world the way that He sees it. Jesus tells a parable to heighten your awareness of what is going on all around you, to give you insight into why people rebel, why they reject the truth, why they aren't like you, and yes, this is a parable that contrasts faith and unbelief, contrasts you with your unbelieving neighbors. The sower of the seed is content to cast it all over the place (that's grace). Some falls on the path and the birds come and devour it. Satan is the birds. He will take away the message of God's love in Christ and the hearers never understand it or even begin to believe. It is not God who causes some to disbelieve. It is the devil who snatches away the message, thus keeping the Word from taking root. How the devil does this and why God allows it is not mentioned. It happens. That's what you should know. Some seed falls on rocky ground. It springs up quickly but there is no root.

Soon such plants wither and die. No root is the initial believer who is all about the trappings of Christianity but doesn't want to understand sacrifice and being crucified with Christ and denial of the sinful nature and trusting God in the face of difficulty. We need to be rooted in Christ; deeply rooted.

Some of the seed falls among thorns. Thorns choke the seed. Jesus says that it's the cares of the world that are the thorns, and the deceitfulness of riches. "Cares of the world" is a pretty large category – it could literally be anything in your life. All of you who are above 5 years old have cares. Looking back on your life, has there ever been anything that would come between you and Christ, between you and faith, between you and this Divine Service? How many people view this Divine Service as a side gig to their faith? How many of y'all view this Divine Service as your absolute life-line, your essential nourishment, your divine dose of medicine that keeps your soul from becoming overly diseased with the world's narcissistic virus?

Perhaps I am idealistic, but I believe that everybody within the sound of my voice is part of the good soil that produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Perhaps I am idealistic, but anyone who is paying attention to Christ's voice the way that we are here is the good soil. Good soil is prepared by Christ Himself, prepared by His Word and Sacraments, prepared by a repentant heart born of a pressing encounter with the law in all of its sternness, born from a deep love of God's grace, born from the Gospel that saturates the life of faith lived out here at Christ the King. I *am* idealistic. But I've seen folks walk away from our congregation. Some go other places. Some go no place at all. I've seen it. You've seen it. Christ has seen it. He tells this parable for Christians to be aware of what sets itself against the Word being fruitful. You can't possibly dismiss Jesus' Words with a blasé and sophisticated wave of the hand. Faith saves you. Unfaith saves no one. There is spiritual danger in this world.

This Word – He's not going to deal with you apart from this Word. God is not going to dream up a new means of His grace just because man is bored with His Word. Holy God works through the Word and the Sacraments – that's it. If you pitch these holy things into the ash bin of irrelevancy then God is not going to zap you from on high by some other means. Christ has explained the parable. It's totally true. You have now heard it. It is a revelation. Jesus has revealed His kingdom to you. For you to see it is wondrous, marvelous, an epiphany of the highest order. Get this: irrespective of what unbelievers do, Christianity is flourishing! The soil in Christ's church has been fruitful for 2000 years. That is His design. Love, joy and peace are laden on the branches of believers. Christ's life permeates His people and His love of life, His joy over salvation, His peace that transcends all understanding – it's all in you. Christianity is flourishing – a hundred, sixty or thirty fold. Christ's church is alive with His grace. The beauty of Christ's sacrifice is gripping more and more people. The privilege of being connected to the Lord of glory is transforming lives every single day. The obvious vanity of the world, the obvious foolishness, foulness, and futility of the world is providing a super-helpful contrast to the Kingdom of God. That too is God's design. Christianity is flourishing.

There is only one reason why the church is flourishing: Christ is with us. The Lord of heaven and earth is in His church. The crucified King has bound Himself to us and He, through us, goes out into the world to interact with others. This Lord of glory is the One who willingly allowed

Himself to be crucified in order to pay for our sin, to defeat death by allowing it to take Him, and to bring new life by rising on the third day, a Sunday. Easter is an eternal day that sweeps into this holy assembly and brings its heavenly fragrance, its promise, and its light. Christ's Kingdom – we are members of that realm of grace. We will guard our hearts for it is the wellspring of life (Proverbs 4:23). We will treasure the Word. We will look to the Sower who sows His seed of faith in us with love. A Christian life, a life of following Christ, loving Him above all things and loving our neighbor as ourselves – that is what it means to soar like an eagle (Isaiah 40:31). May God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit make us truly fruitful. To the glory of His Holy Name!