

Sermon Draft

Text: Isaiah 55:10–13

Sermon: “God’s Word at Work”

Just as water comes down and waters the earth, so, too, does the Word of God accomplish the Lord’s purposes.

One of the most memorable images of the Old Testament is the tower of Babel. When the whole earth had one language, the people said to one another, ***“Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves”*** (Genesis 11:4). The people tried to impress the Lord by building a tower that reached up to him. Thus, they thought, they’d be able to make a name for themselves; they’d never be forgotten.

All our attempts to make a name for ourselves a name on an office door, a name on a donor’s plaque at the new library, even a name our own great-grandchildren will remember are equally worthless and worthy of God’s judgment.

They are always only temporary, and if we use selfish means to gain them, they are even badges of shame that we only wish could be forgotten.

Rather, the prophet Isaiah reminds us that the Word that comes forth from heaven is that which will create a name for the Lord (Isaiah 55:11, 13). That Word that came down from heaven is the Word of God incarnate, Jesus the Christ. By his death and resurrection, Jesus has accomplished our salvation, and, as a result, the Father has exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name (Philippians 2:9). And then he gives his name to us! In the water of Holy Baptism, by the power of his Word and promise, he puts his name on us so that we are those who bear his name. And from that name we will never be cut off.

The Word of the Lord works. Not some of the time, but all the time. It always accomplishes what the Lord purposes. And it always succeeds in doing the thing for which the Lord sends it.

The Word of the Lord works. Not some of the time, but all of the time. This is the promise given to us by the prophet Isaiah. And he gives this promise to us in an image, so that the promise would be clear and we would be certain of the power and efficacy of the Word of God.

The image, of course, is that of rain and snow. It's of moisture that comes down from heaven and always waters the earth. Now, the moisture doesn't always fall on the same place. But when moisture comes, moisture always works. Water never sits there gliding on top of the ground without sinking in. No, it comes down and waters the earth. Even if it falls on soil that's saturated, it moves on until it finds soil that isn't saturated, and it waters that earth.

The point is this: water always works. Not some of the time, but all of the time. It accomplishes the watering of the earth, and it always succeeds, making the soil bring forth and sprout with life.

So, it is with the moisture; so, it is with the Word of God. As moisture works all the time, so does the Word of the Lord. This is Isaiah's point.

And, boy, do we need the Word of God to work. Like a dead, dry desert filled with thorns and thistles and badly in need of some rain or snow to come down and water the ground and give it life, so, too, is this world filling up with the results of mankind's fall into sin. So, too, were the people of Israel to whom the prophet Isaiah was speaking. Thirsty and hungry, with no money to buy food and drink, the people of Israel were helpless to help themselves (Isaiah 55:1). A vineyard having produced only stinking, rotten grapes (Isaiah 5:1–7), on their own, Israel was unable to produce that which would please the Lord.

Cursed by the fall into sin, we are now those who are conceived in sin, so that we come forth in iniquity and are able to do no good thing, pleasing in God's sight. Our sinful spiritual condition is like the desert: dead and dry, badly in need of something to give us life. ***We cannot, by our own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ our Lord, or come to him*** (see SC, Third Article). We are the ones who are powerless on our own to do any good thing.

And so, the Lord sends the Word down from heaven to water the earth. He sends his Son, that is, the Word of God Incarnate, who takes on flesh and blood to come down and water the earth. And water the earth he does.

The only-begotten Son of God, who was not conceived in sin but by the Holy Spirit, so that he might bring life and immortality to all, came down from heaven, was incarnate of the virgin Mary, and was made man. He who was in the beginning the Word of God took on flesh so that he could be crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, die on the cross to atone for our sins, and water the earth with his precious blood. When the Son of God hung on the cross, having suffered hell, he was pierced by the sword, and from his side water and blood poured forth to water the earth.

As the Word of God Incarnate, Jesus Christ, hung there on the cross, he certainly didn't appear to be powerful. He appeared to be defeated and powerless.

So those who scoffed at him were confirmed in their suspicion, while those who had followed him were tempted to despair. The Word of God appeared to be powerless.

But then, in glorious victory, like a sprout shooting forth from the ground, the crucified and dead Jesus is raised from the dead to burst forth from the ground alive and well. That which was sown perishable and in great weakness and dishonor, appearing to have no power at all over sin and death, is raised in glory and power and honor, immortal and imperishable, as the victorious Word of God, whose death only served to conquer death but whose life now serves to give life to the world!

So where does the Lord continue to give this life-giving moisture today? I mean, the Lord Jesus has long since ascended to the right hand of the Father. From where does the heavenly moisture that gives life to this world continue to come? Where are we to look when we are dry and despairing, unable to help ourselves?

Sure, like the rest of the world, we are unable by our own reason or strength to believe in Jesus Christ or come to him. ***But the Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel*** (see SC, Third Article). The Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the Gospel, calls us out of the darkness of our sin to live in the light of the glory of God. The cross may be foolishness to those who continue on in their sin and death, but to those who are being saved, it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18). The death and resurrection of Jesus on behalf of sinners is the Gospel, which is the power of salvation for all who believe and for all who will live victorious with Jesus in the land of the living.

So just as surely as Jesus himself came down from heaven to water the earth with his own blood, so now does the preaching of Jesus serve to deliver the benefits of his blood to those who hear and believe. And just as surely as rain and snow come down from heaven and serve to water the earth does the Word of the cross and the empty tomb now serve to give life to the world. This is the promise given by the prophet.

It is given for us to know and to trust, so that we might be certain that the Word of God will always work.

No matter the setting or how bleak the situation, the death and resurrection of Jesus reveals that the Word will accomplish the Lord's purposes and will succeed in bringing life to the world.

This world is full of sin and death. The curse of the fall still hovers over us, causing us to be born in sin and to commit sin. We are all born sinful and unclean and are unable to do any good thing. We would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation. But the Father of all mercy and grace has sent forth his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who took on flesh to dwell among us.

Though his death appeared to be the end, it has now become the source of life, so that his glorious resurrection is the proof that he has overcome the curse and brought life and immortality to light.

There is now no doubt. It is the Word of the Lord that accomplishes the purposes of the Lord.

Jesus Christ has succeeded in the thing for which he was sent. Now, he continues to send his Word down from heaven to water the earth, and, by his own Spirit, he uses his Word to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify the whole Christian Church on earth, so that sinners would be saved and the dead, dry desert of this world would be filled with life.

Amen