

## **Mission Accomplished**

Today's Gospel lesson is very difficult to preach on. Why? The disciples didn't understand what the parable of the different soils meant, so they ask Jesus to explain it to them. Jesus makes clear the meaning. He teaches it. He explains it. *"Now the parable is this: The seed is the Word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the Word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the Word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the Word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience."* That's it. Those of you who feel some perverse need to add to this, as if Jesus needs your help, **DON'T!** Just let your Lord have the last word. He knows what He's doing. *"This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him!"*

So...maybe the way we need to approach this is, not by trying to reinvent the wheel or improve on Jesus' words, but by simply asking: ***What does this mean for us?*** We'll try to answer this by considering what we hear very plainly in our Old Testament text appointed for today. God says very clearly here that His Word accomplishes ***exactly*** what He purposes it to do. His Word never fails. It never returns to Him void/empty. Basically, God never swings and misses—***EVER***.

Think about this for a moment. God was telling this to Isaiah, who was sent by God Himself to call His beloved, yet very ***thick-necked and sinful*** children to repentance. The problem? They didn't think anything they were doing was wrong. It was, which is why God was telling them, again and again and again, to repent and turn from their wicked and sinful ways. Turn and flee from the false prophets and the ***false saccharine*** that was being passed off to them as "gospel," the false gospel of works-righteousness and impenitent comfort. Turn and flee and hold fast to God and His Truth.

Sadly, though, they weren't listening; not at all. The more Isaiah preached; the more he sowed the seed of the Truth, ***the more it seemed like none of it was working***. People weren't repenting. People weren't turning from their sins. Does this mean that God's Word was ineffective? Was Isaiah (or God) doing something wrong? This is when God comforts Isaiah and the faithful remnant of Israelites. *"My Word accomplishes that which I purpose. It doesn't return to Me void/empty. It succeeds in the thing for which I sent it."*

That's hard to take, when you think about it. God's Word is succeeding, in spite of the fact that it's a dead-ringer for failure? This gets even more difficult to understand when we consider these words in light of the parable Jesus teaches in our Gospel lesson for this morning. We understand God succeeding in the case of the seed sown in good soil. But...God accomplished **exactly** what He purposed in the other three tragic instances too?! This makes it sound like God **purposefully** sowed seed to fail; **like He purposefully sowed seed to die**. No...God does not desire the death of no one. That's the Truth. The wage of sin is death, which is why His Word of Truth goes out to **everyone**. This Word tells the necessary and unvarnished Truth about sin. His Word dares to call things exactly what they are, and He does this out of divine, Fatherly love so that we can know the Truth and repent and flee from such sin and hold fast to Him. He loves enough to tell us the Truth, even if it hurts our feelings.

The children of Adam, on the other hand, just like the serpent who taught us, have always had a way of **twisting and contorting** the facts so that we can come out smelling like a rose. Sometimes we just plain plug our ears and harden our hearts because we don't like what we hear. "*Did God really say...?*" **Yes! God has said! You have no excuse!** "*I didn't know that I was committing adultery. I didn't know that I was guilty of murder. All I did was call that person a fool. It's not like I killed him.*" "*You've heard it said about adultery and murder, but I tell you this....*" Jesus is pretty clear with those teachings, isn't He? God has been very clear about honoring the Sabbath, right? God has been very clear about not neglecting to meet together, as some are in the habit of doing. "*Wait...you mean that blowing off church is a sin? Despising God's Word and Sacraments is a sin? What's the big deal? I still love Jesus.*" Do you realize how foolish that sounds?! That's like saying I love my spouse, but I don't feel the need to ever be around her. I'm going to do what I want, and none of it includes her, but she knows I love her. **Sorry, but the truth is you don't love your spouse. You only love yourself.** "*But God, you don't understand. I didn't need all that hypocrisy and waste of time that is church. Sunday was my only day off; my only day to sleep in. God, you understand, right? Let me in.*" "*Go away, I don't know you.*" That's the kind of Truth that will make a person weep and gnash their teeth...for all eternity.

God's Word does not return to Him void. It accomplishes **exactly** what He purposes. If you choose to not believe the Truth, your opinion doesn't make the Truth any less truthful. It just reveals the ugly truth that **you prefer a lie**. Here's a thought: Maybe God is showing you through these "failures" of the Word that you really aren't the great soil; the great and trusting Christian you think you are. Maybe God is showing you that you are holding to a lie; to false comfort and assurance. Maybe God is showing you that you are a sinner in need of His mercy and grace. His Word *is* working. It *is* successful, maybe not in the way that we measure success, but it is successful, each and every time the seed is sown. It is revealing the Truth; the Truth of sin and the Truth of salvation.

Just look to this cross. This certainly doesn't look like victory, does it? I don't care who you are, this looks like **total and utter defeat**. Always has and always will. And yet...we know the Truth, don't we? "*It is finished*" wasn't a whimper of defeat, **but a cry of victory**; a victorious cry made from His altar of all-redeeming sacrifice when all the world was set free from the bonds of sin, death, and the devil. **The great tragedy of it all?** So many still reject this Truth. It doesn't make sense, does it? Here is God's wrath against sin! Here is proof that God means business! He hates sin so much that He willingly put His own Son to death in order to satisfy its **impossible ransom demand**. How often, though, do we act as if our sins aren't that big of deal...at least not as bad as others? "*I'll do what I want, and I'll just repent later. I'll do what I want, because it's not a sin in this case. God will understand.*" Folks: That's not faith. That's cheap grace. That's the self-justification of someone who really doesn't understand the Truth and reality of sin.

Look here. Here is God's wrath against sin, and at the same time here is God's absolute and unconditional love for you. God loves you so much that He willingly put His own Son to death in order to save you from your justly-deserved punishment. Here it is, on full display, and yet so many **disregard or doubt or outright disbelieve**. And before you look too far down your noses at others, look to this font. Look to this altar. Here is this same victorious Christ, freely holding out His gifts of victory and comfort to all who are heavy-laden. How often have **you** stayed away or blown off these gifts? How often have the weeds of this world choked out these gifts in your own life? **Why? Because you have better, more important things to do?!** How often have these gifts fallen on your hard heart and deaf ears? How often have you denied this Truth to others because you didn't want to offend them or hurt their feelings? How often have you preferred your selfish fleeting version of peace and joy over God's peace and joy that surpasses all understanding; peace and joy that He was willing to die for? The Truth hurts, doesn't it?

*"We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to the Gentiles," but to those who are being saved, both Jew and Gentile, it is the power and wisdom of God.* This seed of almighty God's Law/Gospel accomplishes all that He purposes, and it succeeds in the very thing for which He sent it. This Word; this Seed of Life, first promised in the Garden of Eden, was made flesh for us; to suffer and die for us; to rise again for us. This Word-made-flesh **continues** to dwell with us in order to shine His light into our darkness. He still desires the death of no one. He desires that all hear and turn and flee from their sinful darkness into His marvelous light and life. May God, through the working of His Holy Spirit in these, His means of grace, accomplish this in you and through you, now and into all eternity. **AMEN**