

The Word Does Not Return Empty

7th Sun. after Pent. – 07/12/26 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Isaiah 55:10-13 (w/Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23)

Utah Mission Sunday (RMD) – Pastor Keith Besel

v. 11, [Yahweh says,] “...so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth...it shall accomplish that which I purpose...”

Introduction

✘ At our Rocky Mountain District Convention just over a year ago, where Doug Haiar and I represented Christ's saints here at Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church, we all voted unanimously to work together with all of our fellow saints in this District; a district that encompasses all of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, El Paso, Texas and two congregations in Nebraska; to collectively raise \$1 million to support our current congregations in Utah and more intentionally spread the powerful truth of God's Holy Word in that very difficult climate that is currently under the evil and deceptive influence of Mormonism.

➔ And so, after months of planning and conversation with all 14 of our current LCMS congregations and pastors in Utah, all of our Rocky Mountain District congregations have been asked to designate today as *Utah Mission Sunday* where, by the power of God's Holy Word and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we will kick off this effort that encourages all of us as God's people to consider how we might all take part in the spreading of God's saving truth specifically among the souls of our neighbors directly to our west.

✘ It is a daunting task to be sure, for the devil has long counted the state of Utah as one of his greatest footholds in this country through the alluring and deeply deceptive lies of Mormonism. Though they claim to be “Christian,” even misusing Jesus' name in the blatant lie that is the title of their church body; *The church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, they are clearly not because they reject the Triune God; they say that God, the Father had physical sex with Mary to conceive Jesus; they claim that you and I and all people can become gods ourselves; and that salvation can only be attained by meeting a series of works-based criteria. These are only a few of their many false teachings.

➔ Still, the souls of approximately 2 million people, or 60% of Utah's population have fallen prey to this demonic deception in large part because those people have simply never heard the truth of God's Word purely proclaimed to them in a manner that uncovers the lies and the contradictions that they have been raised to believe.

➔ Since the Mormon church established their home base in Utah in 1847, they have basically taken over the state's population and have established a culture that is intolerant of other religions, including true Christianity of which they claim to be a part. And this culture of intimidation has caused many Christians over the years to just kind of throw up our arms in submission and write the entire state of Utah off as a “lost cause.”

I. The Lord Sends His Word

✘ This is where our Old Testament Reading today, as well as Jesus' parable of the Sower in our Gospel Reading actually convicts us all, for there is no state or country or people anywhere on this planet that God has written off as a “lost cause” for His salvation.

➔ In fact, just as God sent His prophet Isaiah to the people of Israel to open up their eyes to all of the nations and people around them who were not yet aware of His desire to save them from their sin and Satan's deception, so God equips and sends His pastors and people out today to all people everywhere for the very same purpose.

- ➔ And that includes leading us, as God's Church in our time; as His "New Israel," to understand our part in exercising God's desire that all of these souls in Utah might also come to repentance and faith in Jesus alone for their salvation.
- ✘ In the verses just before our Old Testament text today, Yahweh shows His Church – the people of Israel, that they are not the only ones that He wants to save. At the beginning of the chapter, in Isaiah 55:1, God expects all of His people, which includes you and me today, to broadcast His invitation to the heavenly banquet of salvation indiscriminately. "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."
- ➔ So, who are the ones "who thirst?" Well, God uses the image of a market-place where the essentials for human life – things like food and drink, can be obtained to sustain and support life. Even more important than physical, earthly food and drink, is the bare essentials for eternal life with our Creator and God – things like His word of truth, His grace and forgiveness, His Spirit to create a saving faith within us and to sustain us in that faith throughout our earthly life and into Paradise before the throne of God in heaven. Those who do not know God's truth; those who do not acknowledge their sin and their need for a Savior, including those caught in Satan's lies and the world's deceptive enticements, are all a part of those "who thirst."
- ✘ And as God makes clear in His invitation, He offers His gifts of life to everyone! He goes on in Isaiah 55:2-3, urging every soul, "Listen diligently to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to Me; hear, that your soul may live."
- ➔ And only a few verses later in 55:6-7 the offer of salvation continues, "Seek Yahweh while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to Yahweh, that [Yahweh] may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."
- ➔ Notice, God's offer is all grace; His undeserved expression of love. Yet, He will not force anyone to obey His summons.
- ✘ That doesn't mean however, that He leaves any of us to answer His invitation by our own power. No, He provides us with His very own, all-powerful and perfect Word which makes it possible for lost and condemned souls to acquire what they cannot on their own.
- ➔ This is what God means when He says, "Seek Yahweh while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near." It is in His Word of truth; the Word proclaimed by His prophets like Isaiah; proclaimed and shared through His pastors and people already in Utah and here in the rest of the Rocky Mountain District that God comes near to the spiritually thirsty and starving souls of this world.
- ✘ And that Word of God, as verses 10-11 promise, has the power to give new, vibrant life! Just as rain and snow water the earth to provide food for our bodies, so God's Word does not return to Him empty. It accomplishes that which is His purpose!
- ➔ And what is God's purpose? 1 Timothy 2:4 tells us that God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

II. The Power of God's Word

- ✘ That truth is found only and always in the recorded pages of God's Holy Word, which Hebrews 4:12 tells us "is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." With its two different edges; God's Law and Gospel, the very same Word is able 1) to cut through all of the deceptions that Satan, sin and this world use to try and bind people's souls and keep them away from Jesus, so that it convicts us all of our sin to thereby lead us into

repentance; preparing us then 2) for the truth of Christ's sacrifice in our place which frees us and forgives us of all sin when that Gospel is rightly heard and believed for eternal salvation.

→ As Romans 10:12-13 says, "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him. For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" But as Paul asks in the next two verses, in a question that could just as easily be applied to our quandary about the unsaved souls in Utah, "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:14-15).

- ✘ This powerful, life-giving and soul-saving Word of God cannot break through the lies of Mormonism and unbelief if we in Christ's Church are not obeying His call to preach and proclaim and get it into their midst so it can be heard. Because as Romans 10:17 promises, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." In fact, as Paul also said in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."

III. Christ sows through His Word's Proclamation

- ✘ That Gospel power to save souls is not our power, my friends. We can't even save ourselves, how could we ever think of saving someone else. That is always and only God's power; God's work; and God's gift of grace.

→ But He has given us the blessed task of proclaiming His powerful and saving Word far and wide. Yet He warns us to take great care that we preach His Word of truth faithfully. In Revelation 22:18-19, in the Bible's closing words John says, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book." That is exactly what the Mormon church has done, adding the *Book of Mormon* and its lies to what they say people should believe to be saved, and taking away many of God's key truths like the fact that "Jesus and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30) and "...by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

- ✘ Dear Christians, it is so easy for us to take for granted and even neglect the blessing God has given to us in His pure, unadulterated Word. It is not only selfish, but it is sinful for us to just sit here with His truth in our comfortable pews and keep it to ourselves. No, He tells us in verse 12 of Isaiah 55, "You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

→ Did you hear that? All of Creation is proclaiming God's glory and truth. So, why not us? Why are we so hesitant and fearful to do it? And if you can't physically go to Utah yourself, for example, you can certainly go across the street or to your friend at the Rec. Center or to your son or daughter or grandchildren with the truth.

→ And you can absolutely be a part of sowing God's saving Word into Utah through your prayers and your support of our District's efforts to get more pastors and churches established in that area.

- ✘ Like the sower in our Gospel Reading today, our job as believers, is merely to spread the seed; to cast it far and wide, whether it is on the path, the rocky soil, among the thorns or in the good soil. What happens once we proclaim that word of Christ in the midst of those hearts and minds and souls, is out of our control. As Jesus says in Mark 4:26-27, "The kingdom of God is as if a

man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.” But he still scatters the seed.

➔ Yes, some will reject it. That’s the nature of unbelief. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing...”. They will call Christ and us, His followers, fools and we can’t stop that from happening. “But,” Paul continues, “to us who are being saved [the word of Christ] is the power of God.”

Conclusion

✧ Those who believe rightly in Christ and His Word of truth; our LCMS brothers and sisters in Utah, may have a difficult mission right outside their front door. But look, their mission and our mission are the same mission. We are all on the same Christian team. It’s just that our roles in His mission may differ a bit.

➔ Paul addressed this to Christ’s Church in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, when the believers were tempted to say that their part in the mission was more important than someone else’s. Paul said, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”

✧ So, may God use you and me and our fellow believers in Utah and around the world, to sow the seed of His Word faithfully and widely; and then to celebrate His accomplished purpose for that Word as He uses it to His saving glory. Amen.