

## How Can Anybody Hear?

7<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 07/16/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 9, [Jesus directs every soul on earth regarding our attitude toward the hearing of His perfect and saving Word,] **“He who has ears, let him hear...”**.

### **Introduction**

- ⊗ May our gracious and generous Lord grant each and every one of us the grace to hear His Word and understand it this morning and always, Amen.
- ⊗ There is a common saying among those in marketing and advertising; a basic principle to always remember whenever you are trying to spread a message far and wide. It says, “KISS everything”; following the acronym of K-I-S-S it means: “Keep It Simple, Stupid”. In other words, if you want folks to understand what you’re selling or trying to say, keep it reeeeeeal simple.
  - ➔ Well, apparently Jesus didn’t get that marketing memo, because we see here in our Gospel Reading today, and throughout the Gospels, that Jesus used quite a lot of parables to teach the crowds.
- ⊗ Now parables are unique in that they are earthly stories or examples from everyday life intended to teach and convey a much deeper, heavenly meaning. Often times the meaning, as it is here in the Parable of the Sower today, is one that is so important that missing the meaning or intentionally ignoring the lesson that it conveys can be the difference between eternity in heaven or eternity in hell.
  - ➔ So, with a lesson that important, why would Jesus teach it using a parable? I mean, how will the people; how can we learn from something with a “hidden” meaning attached? Wouldn’t that complicate the people’s ability to understand? The disciples even asked Jesus about this in verse 10, one of the verses not included in our official Reading. They asked, “Why do You speak to them (i.e. the crowds and Pharisees) in parables?”
- ⊗ And Jesus answered in reference to something He had already told them earlier that day, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given” (Mt. 13:11).
  - ➔ You see, already that day Jesus faced multiple hostile confrontations with Jewish Pharisees who were rejecting His authority and divinity as the Son of God; calling Him a fraud and a blasphemer, as well as crowds of people who refused to grasp His desire to bring them by faith in to God’s family so that they could be, as you and I are, Jesus’ true brothers and sisters by adoption in faith. It was about these unbelievers, in contrast to His disciples, that Jesus prayed in chapter 11:25, “I thank You, Father...that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding” (that is those who demand that God’s truth must fall in line with human reason and knowledge) “and revealed them to little children” (which are those who simply receive God’s Word by faith).
  - ➔ So when Jesus said to the disciples, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” (13:11), He is reminding them that they are the “little children” He was talking about earlier; the ones with faith who can now more easily understand the parables and the Gospel message of Jesus.
- ⊗ You see, it’s not that God is intentionally hiding His truth from the Pharisees and the crowds, in the sense of keeping it a “secret”. It only seems like it is a secret and impossible to grasp, because they have themselves refused to “Keep It Simple” by their own unwillingness to believe God’s truths like a child.

- So what are you and I today to do with Jesus' Parable of the Sower? Because after all, understanding God's Word can be tough at times. Even "getting" the parables is more than just "understanding" the meaning connected to the words.
- So we can all very easily be like the disciples before Jesus explained the parable to them that day and wonder, "How: how can anybody actually 'hear' God's Word?"
- ✘ In the parable Jesus says that there are at least three bad reasons why God's Word can be so tough to hear and understand. And as a matter of warning and for the sake of caution we will look at those reasons. But I want to make sure, following the KISS principle I talked about earlier, that all of you here today understand very clearly, that the very fact that you have responded to the Holy Spirit this morning and you have come here to worship Christ in His Church means that you and your heart and soul are a living example of the "good soil" that has heard the Word of God and, as His beloved child, you have received it and believed it in joy for your forgiveness and salvation.

### **I. With the devil, our flesh & the world, it's hard to hear**

- ✘ But even Jesus, when He was trying to teach and spread the Good News that He had come so that all people might become a part of God's Kingdom for salvation; even Jesus was confronted with hostility, not taken seriously and rejected outright.
  - In fact, He knows His audience well. He "gets the culture" around Him as you and I must still try to do today. He knows there are things that are keeping souls from hearing and understanding. So He teaches His disciples that even though the Word of God has the power like no other to convert a stone-cold sinner like you and me into a loving believer for Christ, this important truth still exists: that every hearer, in his/her sinful state, has the ability and free will to resist and misunderstand and reject the very thing that their soul needs more than anything else.
  - As Martin Luther says in the Catechism, "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him...". I just can't do it. Faith is a gift; an undeserved gift from God. So what is it that keeps so many souls from hearing?
- ✘ First, when He talks about the seed that falls on "the path" Jesus says that the devil is a major force at play. Satan is like the birds who snatch the seed off the path. Certainly, we all can attest to the fact that the devil exists, because we notice the perversion of our thoughts even while we're listening to a sermon in worship. What are you thinking about right now? Are you thinking about what you did last night, or what you will be doing later today? Whatever it is, leave it up to the devil to shorten your attention span and introduce so many other thoughts into your mind that have no business inside God's holy house.
  - Second, with the image of the seed that falls on the "rocky ground" Jesus warns us about our own flesh. Yes, our sinful flesh so instinctively and desperately looks for the next spiritual high, or as we often hear it said, "whatever really moves me" or "speaks to my heart". These are the surface-deep feelings and emotions that so easily mislead the human heart. As long as everything is going well, then this Word from God is "the best ever". But when tribulation and persecution come, the heart is no longer so sure about it and God's Word is then quickly abandoned. Those who are like the seed on the rocky soil, do all they can to avoid suffering and conflict of any kind; bouncing on to the next idea or agenda or so-called "answer to life" that seems more palatable at the time.
  - Third, talking about the seed that falls among thorns, Jesus speaks of this world as a roadblock to faith. The soul that loves the ways and attractions of this world, such as money, position, pleasure, power and self-indulgence, to the point that they become too important to let Jesus' gift of salvation and truth take its rightful place as God in life; this is the soul that chokes

out the saving Word of Christ so that it bears no beneficial fruit. Oh, the things and concerns of this world so quickly and so easily can take over and become a person's god indeed.

- ✘ Yes, the devil, our flesh and this world make up the unholy trinity that keeps the ears of mankind from hearing "the Word of the Kingdom" that "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

→ In the Catechism, the meaning of the Third Commandment calls all hearers not to "despise preaching and God's Word". Yet that's exactly what happens when listening problems and lack of understanding come about isn't it? Just as Jesus experienced, so it is today, preaching and God's Word are despised, criticized and ignored outright.

## II. God's Word is heard as gift

- ✘ But, thanks be to God, His Word is heard by many, and when it is – and understood – what blessings come about! Jesus said to His disciples in verses 16-17, "But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

→ How does that happen? The answer again is in verse 11. Jesus said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven." The same is true of you and me right now today, dear Christians. Hearing and understanding God's Word is given to us undeservedly; it is a gift!

- ✘ The seed has been sown freely and widely over this entire world of souls by God's love and power; in His various means of preaching, teaching and sacrament. And so, you have been given the Spirit of God in Christ. For many of you, that first happened at your Baptism. His life-giving water and Word took root and the eyes of your heart were opened wide to see that Jesus truly is the Son of God who came to take away the sins of the world by dying for you on the cross.

→ And now you continue to hear and believe the Gospel of Jesus, because as Paul says in Romans 1:16, "...it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...". Only God's Word kills the sinner inside of us and raises the new man to life – just like the seed that dies in the ground and then sprouts and grows and eventually bears fruit. As Romans 10:17 declares, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ."

→ And what does this "Word of Christ" tell us? That Jesus, with His death on the cross, conquered outright the devil, the world, and our flesh so that we have the confidence to pray to the Father, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." And boy, do we need to pray for that every day, because that evil is not just some impotent, inanimate, impersonal substance. It is the evil one himself, whose only goal is to steal the Word from within your hearts and to tempt you with suffering so that you might follow the world instead of Jesus.

- ✘ But as Jesus said in John 16:33, "I have overcome the world", which happened at the same time that He overcame the devil in His death and resurrection. So now, with His Word growing and maturing in the soil of our souls, you and I have the confidence to pray for the Lord's help and strength to resist the snares and traps that the devil sets for us every day.

→ Jesus sowed His seed in you, friends so that you would receive His gift of faith; so that you are now able to joyfully hear and understand His Word of truth in both Law and Gospel.

- ✘ For what purpose? As Jesus taught us in the parable: first, to "bear the fruit" of complete forgiveness, perfect peace with the Father, eternal salvation with Him in heaven, and the strength and joy and everything else that we need to live as His beloved child while we remain

here on earth. All of this is His gift of grace alone. We have done nothing to earn or deserve it. It's all due to His immeasurable love.

→ The second reason God's Word is growing within us is that we might yield more seed. What a privilege God has given us to go from soil with a newly planted seed of salvation in our souls to each of us now as active sowers of the seed in His Kingdom work. And just as it was in the parable, there are no places, regardless of their potential to grow, where the Word of God may not or should not be shared and preached, whether it is over the path, the rocks or the thorny areas.

✘ That's because God's grace is for everyone. Everybody who hears the words you have heard today needs the same certainty that Jesus really has died and actually has risen in victory for them; for their forgiveness; so that they too might have eternal salvation!

→ And as you sow that seed of Jesus, remember the KISS principle, though with a bit of a sanctified twist now that the Gospel seed has transformed your soul. When you share Jesus with others be sure to Keep it Simple Saint!

## **Conclusion**

✘ For every chance to hear God's Word is an opportunity for a sinner to hear of Jesus' loving work so that, by His grace, he/she might become one of His beloved saints wrapped in the righteousness of Jesus for evermore.

→ You have God's promise in Isaiah 55:10-11 assuring you that it's not you, but His Word always doing the work, just as it did within your own heart, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be," says the LORD, "it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

→ Nothing is more simple than that. Amen.