

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost
July 10, 2011
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Scriptures: Isaiah 55:10-13; Romans 8:1; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Let It Rain!

To prophesy; is not about telling the future but about pointing out. Pointing out when things are going wrong. Pointing out when people are doing wrong things. Pointing out when sin brings about judgment and destruction. It's not a very pleasant task which is why many of the prophets said no right up front when they were called. Jonah is probably the most famous of all. The one who did not want to go to Nineveh because to go there to announce that God was about to judge and destroy them was not really the job description he wanted to sign up for. But there's also Moses, who used every available excuse to get himself off the task of confronting Egypt's Pharaoh. And then, after the time of Jesus, there was Paul who did not think a persecutor of the church was the right one to become an apostle of the church. In one way or another, the charge of announcing bad news was not what they were hoping for.

Nevertheless, not everything was bad. At other times, the prophets were also called to bring good news. Hope at times when everything seems to point to the contrary. Chapter 55 of Isaiah is such an example. The people to whom the prophet speaks are in need of such a word of hope. The Babylonian exile has been too much to bear. The city is destroyed. Families are torn apart. The Promised Land has been lost. In the midst of that the prophet announces a world where the impossible becomes possible again. The elements of creation are expressive of the joy brought about by God. The bearer of good news uses language of celebration: The mountains shall sing; the trees will clap. He uses language of transformation: Instead of thorns there will be cypresses, instead of brier there will be myrtle. And above all Isaiah uses language of God: The things that will happen will speak of the things God does; it will all be a reconstruction that will not be undone evermore.

Speaking about God, it is in fact the Word of God what will bring about what the prophet announces. The Word of God is like the rain and snow that water the ground which causes the food that nourishes the body to grow. You see, rain and snow have a purpose. They provide the key ingredient, liquid water, so that the earth can produce the food to sustain the rest of creation. And it has to do that before it will return to the skies in the shape of a cloud to fall back again to the earth to keep the cycle going. The Word of God works like that water cycle. In the words of the prophet, it will not return to God until it does that which it was sent to do.

We may wonder, what is that word? What does it say? How does it come to us? Who sends it? Where does it go back to? We pair up that reading from Isaiah with that of the parable of the sower and we may just assume that it talks about the Bible. We assume that it refers to the word of God as we find it written in Genesis, or the Psalms, or the

Gospels, or Revelation, or anything in between. And yes, there is good reason to interpret it in such a way. The Word of God indeed fulfills in us a purpose from God, but I want to say there's more than that. Because the Word of God is not only that which is written, it is also that which has come. That which is alive. That which is made of flesh and blood. Jesus, in the words of John, is the Word.

You see, the seeds being spread out by sower represent more than just words of wisdom. I'd like to think that God is the sower. I'd like to think that Jesus is the seed. And indeed, I want to think that your heart and my heart, our very lives are the different kinds of soil where that seed is falling. We hear that it may just happen that my soil may not be ready to receive the seed and let it sprout immediately. And indeed there are times in my life when I'm more or less receptive. We go through temptations, distractions, and who knows what else. But here's the point where I want to get to today. The seed keeps coming. If it's not this season it will be the next. The sower keeps sowing with indiscriminate love. The sower keeps spreading with no regard whatsoever about where the seed is falling. Jesus, the seed, the word, keeps coming. The Word of God keeps bringing moisture to the soil. And it will make the earth sprout with good fruit. Because the Word, Jesus, does not return to God until it has done what which it was sent to do!

Paul writes a little sentence in his letter to the Romans that sums up what I'm trying to say. These people, the believers in Rome, they were trying hard. They were trying hard to figure out all this talk about Jesus. They are, like us, the kind of ground where it is not so easy for the seed to give fruit. But precisely for those who are trying, for those who want, for those who in spite of the difficulties still hold on to the faith that things can turn out to be good, Paul says: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!" (Romans 8:1). Do not confuse the inability of the terrain to provide a nurturing environment for the Word to grow with condemnation. Even if it happens that we are not ready yet, it continues to be true that the Seed, the Word, Jesus has not come to condemn but to save. He continues coming to us, like that never ending cycle of water in which it rains down, moistens the earth, goes back up only to return one more time and do it all over again. That's what God does for us. Because God's word does not return until it has done that which it was sent to do. Because there's not condemnation for those who are in Christ. Amen.