

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 55:10-11

¹⁰ As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, we thank you for planting in us the seed of your Word. By your Holy Spirit help us to receive it with joy and to bring forth fruits in faith and hope and love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day

Alleluia. The Word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. Alleluia. (Deuteronomy 30:14)

Sermon Text:

Robert Burns wrote the poem "To A Mouse" in 1785 after plowing up a nest while working a field. Around 152 years later, John Steinbeck took the title of his 1937 novel *Of Mice and Men* from one of its now famous lines. It's translated in various ways from the old Scottish dialect but one of the common renditions reads, "The best-laid plans of mice and men often go astray, And leave us nothing but grief and pain, For promised joy!" Cheerful thought isn't it? And Old Yiddish proverb that has been attributed to a good many people says, "If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans." One more for good measure. In the early 1400's Thomas A' Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ* wrote, "For man proposes, but God disposes".

The point? Well they're all the same are they not. We like to think we are in control ... even when we are really not in control of much of anything. Look around in our world today and you'll come to that conclusion relatively quickly. And man? Well we are trying with all of our might to prove that we have some control aren't we? Politics has pretty much exploded with just about every promise you can imagine but they are rarely kept. Decisions are made and just about as quickly, the dissenting opinion rockets into view. It almost seems that we are living in a time in which only one promise can be kept ... promises will be broken. Our Words seem empty.

In the book of Isaiah the prophet, God has been emphasizing that very point for about 54 chapters. He has been exposing the sin of Israel, of Judah and announcing that their rebellion against Him will come to nothing. Other nations will bear the sword of God against His chosen people and then those nations will also in turn face God's wrath for their wickedness. But, in chapter 55, we come to one of those gems of Isaiah. In verses 6-7 God beckons for His wayward people to return, "*Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*" But this is no empty promise or some well intention plan without any hope of fulfillment. No, instead our lesson today announces that God gives **A WORD THAT IS NEVER EMPTY!** It can't be! **BECAUSE OF WHO IT BELONGS TO** and **BECAUSE OF WHAT IT WAS DESIGNED TO DO.**

¹⁰ *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,* ¹¹ *so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

Notice especially that second verse. There we find a form of the word "I" five different times. I suppose we could say that God is stressing something. *so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.* This Word belongs to God and, as we say in Catechism class, therefore it mirrors the characteristics of God.

It carries the power of the One who speaks it. I grew up in the desert climates of New Mexico, nestled in the valley of Albuquerque at the base of the Sandia Mountains. What they consider humid, Wisconsinites would call bone dry. Lots of sand lots of sage brush, think of your typical western and you have a pretty good idea of the landscape. But something amazing would happen when it rained. Life would spring into action. Flowers would open up seeds would sprout and grow drinking up every last drop of the rain, every last drop of water before the dry conditions around them began stealing it back. Water was all that was needed and it possessed the power to get life rolling in the desert. God says, *so is my word that goes out from my mouth*. Powerful!

Of course that makes it different than the weak and wobbly words of man. To often our promises fail, to often our desires evaporate like the very water that brought the desert to life when the hot sun would bake it into oblivion. This is not God's Word. While powerful it is also eternal, or changeless. Isaiah has already said as much! In chapter 40, he pens those well-known words, "*The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.* (Isaiah 40:8)" This is power wielded by the Almighty and therefore a power that can be trusted and relied upon and does *not change like shifting shadows* (James 1:17). So Jesus Himself, the Word made flesh (John 1:1), prays for His disciples and all of us when He says, "*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.* (John 17:17)" Oh dear friends the Word of our God is no empty thing because of the very One to Whom it belongs.

This of course, is of highest importance, because of what that Word is meant to do! Our verses make that pretty clear as well don't they? They are to do with humanity what the water does upon the earth. Bring it to life! We can back up to very beginning of the chapter to hear God's gracious call, "*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.* ² *Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.* ³ *Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live.* (Isaiah 55:1-3)"

Yes, God's Word will do it as it exposes our sinfulness and thus the need for a Word more powerful than our own. Because I make plans and too often do not follow through. Because I promise but don't provide. Because the thoughts and desires of my heart often lead to plans which don't make God laugh but cry, I need a Law which is *like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces* (Jeremiah 23:29) that my stony and dead heart might be revived in the glory of the gospel.

Yes, it is the gospel which is the water of God's glorious and gracious Word. It shows me not my sinful and wretched ways but the God who saves me from them. A Savior who is the Word incarnate, God made flesh that He might take my place in a world that has spun hopelessly out of control and go to work on my behalf. His perfection fulfilling the righteous demands of holy God. His precious blood quenching the dry and thirsty desert of my sin as it pays for it in full on the cross. His resurrection offering hope, offering a future, not mere empty Words that disappear as quickly as they are whispered but powerful and effective, life-giving Words winged into our hearts by the Holy Spirit and connecting us to the Work of our Savior and the enduring love of our heavenly Father for all eternity.

So certain can we be in this Word then that we become sowers ourselves, holding it out, sharing it with others, certain in uncertain times that God still has the power to enlighten, to sanctify, to give life in a dying world to all with whom His word comes into contact. Yes, our plans can and often do go astray but what God plans ... well, "*As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*" **GOD'S WORD IS NEVER EMPTY! Amen!**